

I'm a Healer, But...

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I'm a Healer, But...

by [yellowleader](#)

Summary

Magic always comes with a price, which is why superpowers are the best evolution since bipedalism, and of all powers, healing is one of the rarest- and thus, healers are quickly stolen away by heroes the moment their powers are discovered.

Which is why the SBI, semi-immortal villains who can only die by injury, want their hands on one. So when a weird, loud, pushy teen shows up and offers to trade them a powerful healer in exchange for the smallest, simplest favor... how could they say no?

Too bad this won't be as easy as they think.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

No day is normal when it comes to the Syndicate, but the day they meet Tommy is weirder than most.

Strange things are part of the territory when you're part of the most powerful villain organization in the country. Anything ranging from accidental blood stains on nice new rugs to demon summoning via Old Magic happens on the regular. Very little fazes Technoblade anymore.

However, coming home to find a strange *person* on the couch is very different. Demons he's used to- Phil has quite a few 'old friends' he likes to catch up with every few decades- but this is a human person. A *young* human person. He'd almost expect it to be a trap of some sort, but the kid doesn't even look up from the television as Technoblade shambles inside.

"...Hey," Techno calls back through the front door. "Did you forget to tell me someone was comin' over?"

"What? No, no one's-" Phil steps inside, carrying their groceries, but pauses when he sees the person on the couch. "Uh. Hello, mate. Have you got the wrong house?"

It's a ridiculous question. This is the only house in the middle of the woods, miles from the closest town. No one's going to *accidentally* stumble on their home and think it's where they're supposed to be.

The kid finally looks away from the TV- was he really watching the *Office* that intently?- and, presumably, looks the both of them over. It's hard to tell when he's wearing sunglasses indoors. "Yeah, maybe. Thought this was supposed to be the Angel of Death's house, but it's a total nerd cave instead. Which of you is the weeb?" He leans over to pick up a volume of *Bleach* off the coffee table and turns it over, reading the back.

"Wh- that's *mine*, " Phil says, dropping the groceries and reaching out for it, but Techno grabs him by the wrist and pulls him back.

"And *why*, " Technoblade asks slowly, "were you looking for the Angel of Death?"

No one looks for the Angel. Nor do they look for the Blade or the Siren, either- people run screaming at the *suggestion* they might be in the area. There's no good reason for this random kid to be searching out the Angel of Death, unless he's about to cause problems. It's worse that he seems entirely unfazed, as though he knows something they don't. Is this a vigilante he hasn't heard of yet, maybe? Someone with reason to be unafraid?

But the kid doesn't even stand up. He doesn't seem armed, there's no glow of magic or powers- he's just sitting on the couch, totally unaffected by the question. "I wanna talk to him, *obviously* . Feel like that wasn't hard to sus out, big man."

Phil shares an uneasy look with Techno before glancing back at the child. “Listen... what’s your name?” Phil asks delicately.

“Yeah, I’m gonna give my name to the guy who does *Old Magic* , okay,” the kid mumbles, making Techno tense more.

The reason Old Magic is *old* is because no one knows it anymore. Few people even realize it exists, fewer can recognize it. The ones who can are usually the ones who were *around* to see it used, centuries ago- or the poor bastards who have had it used against them. This kid shouldn’t know about it. He shouldn’t have realized that the Angel of Death uses Old Magic along with his actual powers.

“Tommy,” the kid says, distracting Techno from his thoughts. “It’s Tommy. But don’t start any shit, okay? I’m here with an *offer*, not a threat or anything.”

That gets a surprised laugh out of Phil, though Techno is still one wrong word from pulling out his sword. “An ‘offer’? What kind of offer is it, then?”

“What, you get my name and I don’t get yours? Fuck right off.” The kid- Tommy- crosses his arms over the back of the couch, leaning his chin on them as he eyes them both. Techno idly notes the black gloves he’s wearing. “The Angel and the Blade, right? Cool villain names, really fucking awkward to talk to you with ‘em.”

“Well, we aren’t about to give out our names to some kid who broke into our house, mate. Especially not one with some ambiguous, ominous offer.”

“...yeah, well, I was just asking to be nice. You left your mail out, *Phil*. ‘least I’m assuming you’re Phil. This guy doesn’t look like he could be named *Phil*. ”

Another laugh from Phil. “And I do?”

Techno lets out a low growl. “Phil, he’s-”

“Ha!” Tommy cuts him off. “I was totally right!”

“*Phil*, ” Techno says again. “This kid broke into our house, went through our things, an’ won’t even say what he’s here for. I’m gonna-”

Tommy squawks, cutting him off *again*. “Hey! I said I’d tell you the offer after I got your names!”

Phil shakes his head. “Look, Tommy, I’m not sure what you came all the way here for, and I especially don’t know how you got into our house-” Without setting off all the traps, anyway. “-but I sincerely doubt you have anything to offer us that we don’t have. Do you need me to get you an Uber back to town-?”

“The Syndicate doesn’t have a healer, do they?” Tommy asks.

They both freeze.

Old Magic *hurts*. It's made out of sacrifices, blood and lives taken in exchange for more blood and lives. While it can keep people alive long past their natural lifespan, it can't fix broken bones or stab wounds. They haven't had a healer in quite some time- the last one died before Wilbur was born. They've been uncomfortably safe since. No reckless battles, running off if they think they could get killed... It's been *obnoxious*, honestly. If this kid can offer them a *healer*...

"A healer," Phil says quietly. "What kind of healer? How powerful?"

"No magic, all powers," Tommy clarifies. Those are the best kinds of healers. Even new magic requires sacrifices, anything from ingredients to the healer's own health. Healing *powers*, on the other hand? They're incredibly rare, but incredibly valuable- little to no risk of backfiring, they rarely have any drawbacks attached to their abilities... That'd be worth almost any price this kid could ask of them.

"An' how, exactly, did you get your hands on a healer?" Techno asks. As much as he'd want to agree immediately, this question is important. All healers are meant to go straight into the Hero Organization as soon as they're discovered- and powers are hard to not use. If someone tries to shove down their powers, it's like an itch, demanding their attention and driving them mad until they use them. They also usually leave some kind of residue, making it even harder to keep it a secret. If this kid has an unclaimed healer, either the healer is some kind of late power bloomer, or they're *very* young.

"Does that really matter?" Tommy's grinning. "I've got one, and you can have him!"

Phil sighs. "Now, that's an important question-"

"An' *why* would the healer be okay with working for us?" Powers tend to come from people's personalities. Healers are gentle, kind people, who want nothing more than to help others. They don't work with *villains*, not unless something terrible has happened to them, something that's warped them since their power development. Is this healer traumatized? Or... does Tommy have them hostage?

Not that Technoblade can say shit about using hostages. And he doesn't really care about the mental health of their healer, as long as they don't try to escape or betray them. But if that's a risk, he needs to know up front.

"I'll answer that later," the kid says, which is starting to piss him off. He's spouting a lot of nonsense but avoiding all their important questions. "But listen. I'm offering a *good* healer- experience fixing anything from fevers to broken ribs- who's willing to work for you for his *whole* life. I think that's a pretty good offer, yeah?"

Fevers. A healer that can handle illnesses as well as physical injuries? They can't *not* take this deal. But- "And what do you want in return?" Phil asks, his voice getting harsher.

For the first time, the kid looks a little nervous, and he shifts on the couch, trying to get more comfortable. "One hero dead. That's fair, right?"

Tommy could ask for all the money, gems, and gold they have and it would still be a rip off. A permanent healer is worth more than any object on the planet- if he'd asked for the whole Hero Organization dead, that would *maybe* be equivalent to the kind of healer he's offering. One hero? The kid's lying, one way or another.

"You're joking," Techno says, voice low and threatening. "You want-?"

"Okay, fine, one hero *incapacitated*," Tommy says quickly. "Or- whatever it takes, as long as he's out of commission. That *has* to be a good trade." His gloved fingers tighten on the back of the couch. "I mean, you guys get injured all the time, so- so you *need* a healer, and you won't have to back down when you have one, so you could just- one and done, right? It wouldn't even be a big deal!"

Techno glances at Phil, and sees his own confusion mirrored back at him. The kid is bargaining down. Why is he bargaining down?

Tommy broke into the home of the most dangerous villains in the nation, probably the most dangerous in the world. He sat on their couch, waiting for them to get home, and then immediately offered them the one thing that would prevent them from trying to silence him... in exchange for the cheapest price he could ask for after *cash*. He knows what his bargaining chip is, he's done some stupid things to try to trade it- but he's bargaining *down*.

"...which hero?" Techno asks after a long silence.

Tommy immediately sits up straight. "So you'll do it?"

"I'll answer that later," he says, mocking Tommy's previous tone.

It gets to him, from the way Tommy scowls. "Hey, dickhead-"

"You said it first!" Phil defends him. "Besides, we do need to know who it is before we make any firm agreements. We do have a few... associates who work on the other side of the line we wouldn't want to harm, and some others would be quite a pain to handle."

Tommy tilts his head- he's hard to read with the sunglasses on, but he seems alarmed. "Wait, you have heroes working for you?"

"*Phil*," Techno growls.

"No, none of them work for us," Phil quickly clarifies. "We just have a few friends. Anyway, we need a *name*, Tommy."

"Clay!" Tommy answers quickly. "Clay Taken, that's his- wait, did you mean his legal name or- whatever, it's Dream. The hero Dream."

The number one hero, Dream. His power was mere luck- always finding what he needed, fights bending into his favor by *chance*. It made him annoying, but he could be overpowered. Techno himself had beaten him multiple times, but never finished the job- Dream was *fun* to fight against.

It would be a shame to end that, but a healer is worth it.

“You know his real name?” Phil asks, confused.

Tommy pauses at that. “Well. Yeah. I know him.”

“Y’know,” Techno drawls. “If you want him ‘out of commission’, all you’d have to do is out his name. He’d have to go into hidin’-”

“He wouldn’t,” Tommy cuts him off, voice sharp. “He’s *always* Dream the hero.”

...sure, the guy is married to his job, but even the most serious people have *something* besides it. The Warden has his partners, JSchlatt has his cryptocurrency- even Technoblade has a family. Someone devoting themselves entirely to heroism or villainy just isn’t healthy.

“Besides, he’d just want revenge then,” the kid mumbles bitterly. “He needs to be *gone*. ”

He wishes Wilbur were here. His power is annoying as hell when it’s turned on Technoblade, but with this kid? Techno *needs* to know what his deal is. If he’s lying, what he’s lying about, why he wants Dream dead so badly- only Wilbur will be able to pry that out of him. But there are others who would easily pay this price for a healer, and they can’t afford to give up this chance.

They’re already so powerful. A healer would make them *unstoppable*.

“Fine,” Techno agrees, not even waiting for Phil’s response. “Dream’s head, in exchange for the healer.”

“...wait. Wait, seriously?” The kid gets up on his knees on the couch, leaning over the back of it to get a closer look at Techno. “You’re not joking, right? You’ll really do it?”

“Yeah, mate,” Phil answers for him. “We can take care of one hero, no problem. But we will need to meet the healer, yeah? Make sure they’re what you’re trying to sell us-”

“You can check with Ace,” Tommy interrupts yet again. “You work with him? Big Q, from the casino? I had to prove it to him before he’d give me your address. You can trust his word, right?”

How the fuck does this kid have connections with *Ace*? Connections enough to get Quackity to sell out their fucking address? Techno’s starting to feel like he maybe should have heard of this kid before. He must have some fucking pull, to have a healer and *Quackity* at his beck and call.

“Yeah, that... that’ll work,” Phil says, clearly thinking the same things. “Then... we’ll meet them when it’s done?”

“That’s right!” Tommy has gone from high strung to completely relaxed. “But in the meantime...”

Techno is immediately on edge. They already made their deal- what else could he want?

“I’ll be staying here!”

“...heh?”

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Phil was not looking forward to the next... unknown amount of time.

Not that he has anything against Tommy in particular. Tommy is unusual, but he doesn't seem malicious. They can't be sure until Wilbur's return in a few days, but Tommy is so exuberant now that they've agreed to his terms. Even with his sunglasses he refuses to take off, his moods are easy to read, and he holds nothing back.

However, he *really* holds nothing back.

"Phil. *Phil*. What kind of name is Phil, anyway? It's not your real one, I'm guessing, because you're old as balls. Fucking ancient, you are. I can't imagine that your parents from the fucking, first century or whatever looked at you when you were a baby with big fuckoff bird wings and went 'yup, that's a Phil if I've ever seen one' -"

Tommy had made a strong argument for why he was staying with them- not why he should be *allowed* to stay with them, but why he *was* staying. He had no intent of leaving, even if they kicked him out. But he'd pointed out- if anything happened to him, they'd never get connected to their healer.

The healer was... supposedly, in a safe place. 'The safest, as secure as the Vault', Tommy had claimed. But Tommy himself needed to be... here, for some reason.

Phil is assuming that Tommy needs to be here for the same reason he needs Dream to be dead. Still, it's not his concern. One dead Dream, and then the Syndicate gets their healer.

It does feel... odd to be making this sort of deal. Their last healer had joined them out of mutual respect. She had chosen to stick with them for quite a few years before passing away. They had offered her Old Magic, the same they used to extend their lifespans, but she was unwilling to pay the price, and in the end she went peacefully.

Now, they were buying a healer.

Techno may be uncaring about the state the healer is in, but Phil has his concerns. Someone willing to sell their life away to the most dangerous villains in history is not someone who is doing well. It really depends on why Tommy wants Dream dead. Is it for his own reasons? Or is it for the healer's?

It would make sense, if the healer was just using Tommy as a middleman. Maybe they have a grudge against Dream, and they just had Tommy pass the message along- but Tommy is the one who got tense the moment they hesitated to agree to kill him. Maybe he and the healer are friends, Phil considers. The healer could be willing to trade themselves for Tommy's

happiness or safety. Or maybe it's the other way around, and Tommy suggested joining the Syndicate because they're the best protection against heroes.

It could also make sense if they were avoiding being drafted into the Hero Organization. If they had higher aspirations than being a medic... then they wouldn't sign up to be a villain's instead, actually. That's probably not the case. But Tommy won't speak any further on the subject, instead just trying to annoy them both to death.

"Hey, Blade. Blade. If Phil's the weeb, are you the one who's got all the music sheets all over the place? I mean, I'd think it's the Siren's, but maybe you've got hidden depths or something, fuck if I know. You can't be all swords and blood or whatever. Well, I guess you could, but I doubt it. What are you into, huh?"

Techno just grunts. Phil can tell he's already lost his patience, and is just doing his best to endure anyway. Techno likes his routine, so having Tommy here is *not* good for him, but he's doing his best anyway. Phil appreciates it.

"Mate, leave him alone," Phil says to Tommy. "I know you're bored, but why don't you just go back to watching TV?"

Tommy snorts. "Yeah, because TV is as interesting as the Blade and the Angel of Death. Sure."

Techno grunts again, more annoyed this time. "We agreed to babysit you, not entertain you."

"Hey! It's not *babysitting*!" Tommy shouts, far too loud. "Just because you're fucking *ancient* doesn't mean you can treat me, the biggest man in this room, like a child-"

"We're treatin' you like a child because you act like one. How old are you, anyway?"

"Twenty-three," Tommy says, far too fast to be the truth. It's like he had the answer pre-prepared... which it probably was.

Phil shakes his head. "No, you aren't."

Tommy scowls. "Fine, twenty."

...Phil could have maybe believed twenty-one, but how quickly Tommy went to lower numbers... he doubts that's the truth, either. "Tommy," he says, using his best dad voice.

Tommy hunches his shoulders. "What the fuck's it matter? I don't see you bitches giving out your ages. It's-"

"Are you even eighteen?" Techno eyes him. "I don't wanna add child abduction to my record. I think it'll make the other stuff look cringe."

"You're already cringe!" Tommy shoots back.

"Ouch," he says dryly.

Phil interrupts before Tommy can yell more. “Mate, you didn’t answer the question. Are you... at least an adult?” Tommy crosses his arms instead of answering, sinking into the couch further. Oh god, he’s actually a child. “*Tommy-*”

“You’re not gonna get child abduction on your record,” he mutters. “That’s only if you take people from their parents, right? I don’t have those. So.”

...how the hell did a *child* do all this? He got his hands on an unaligned healer, he’s made deals with Ace, he broke into the Syndicate’s *home* ... and all he wants is one person dead. Who the hell is Tommy? What in the world brought him to this point in life?

“*Phil,*” Techno distracts him from his thoughts, and he realizes his wings are fluffing up. He settles down and starts straightening out his feathers, a bit sheepish. If there’s one weakness Phil has, it’s the idea of children with horrible childhoods. He was a *mess* when Wilbur found out about his son, Phil’s grandson, and they found him living alone. He was half starved and ill from eating berries he had been forced to scavenge, the food in the house expired or eaten since his mother’s death. They had brought Fundy right home, and Phil had spent months hovering over him, helping him get happy and healthy. He can feel that same instinct now, but he can’t let himself get swept away by it.

For one, he’s positive that Tommy would never allow it.

For another, Tommy is a very temporary presence in their home. As soon as Wilbur is home, they’ll come up with a plan to get rid of Dream, go through with it, and then trade Tommy out for their new healer.

Oh, their *healer*- “Is the healer as young as you are?” Phil asks. It’d make sense. For a healer to not be taken in by the Hero Organization yet, they’d probably be in their teens, freshly developing their powers. That could be how Tommy knows them, too, if they went to the same school or something along those lines...

Techno sighs at Tommy’s silence. “Okay, so we *are* getting charged-”

“The healer’s an orphan too, asshole.”

“That’s not better,” Techno says, as Phil stifles a distressed chirp. A *child* is selling their powers to *villains* - for a better life? For safety? This is painting a *very* upsetting picture, and he’s having more and more doubts about this entirely.

But he knows better. Techno and Wilbur have been searching for a new healer for quite some time now, and they won’t want to let this opportunity slip by. Besides, if Phil *can* help, then he should, if only to soothe his instincts. “We need to build an extension on the house,” Phil says as soon as the thought comes to mind.

“Aw, man, *Phil,*” Techno groans.

“What? Where the fuck did that come from?” Tommy asks.

“Well, if they’re a child, they need-”

“He’s *sixteen*, not a baby-”

“-a safe place, and I don’t want to just convert Fundy’s room-”

“It’s not like Fundy’s going to use it!” Techno protests. “Phil, Phil, don’t make me build on a whole new part of the house, it’s already a four bedroom-”

“But if they’re staying with us permanently, we’ll need more space anyway!”

Techno groans, running a hand down his face. “I’ll give you the *world*, Phil, but I’m not giving you another goddamn addition to the house. Especially not for some kid we don’t even know yet.”

“Then I’ll hire someone,” Phil decides. “One of the Warden’s partners does construction in his free time, doesn’t he? I’m sure-”

“Phil. *Phil*. My beautiful winter cottage aesthetic, Phil.”

“Oh, Foolish would like the challenge of adding to it while keeping to your aesthetic,” Phil nods. “Besides, we need more space in general anyway, don’t we? Our storage has been getting full, and I could use a larger bedroom anyway-”

“Are you plannin’ to add an extension or to just tear down the whole place?” Techno asks, alarmed.

“No, no, just an extension, probably...”

“*Probably?*”

“Wow.” Tommy looks between the both of them. “You two are fucking nuts.”

Chapter End Notes

do not expect chapters to normally come out this fast, this was just pre-written and i was excited to put it out there. ive got the next one half-done though so it shouldn't be too long!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur loves his family, but sometimes he really hates Technoblade.

This is supposed to be his ‘time off’- though, really, being a supervillain never stops. Still, he was meant to be left alone for just a few weeks, letting him spend some time with his son.

Poor Fundy is the victim of a recent dumping- more than that, his fiancé was cheating on him. He didn’t want to be alone, so Wilbur dropped everything the moment he could to join him.

But Techno has called him *twice* in the last hour, which never bodes well, and he’s trying to listen to Fundy’s venting but he’s starting to worry about what’s happening back at home...

“-at first I just thought it was because his little brother went missing, you know? I thought he was just freaking out because he ran away, and he was too stubborn to ask for emotional support. Okay, I’d give him space! But then he never answered his phone, and he was always busy with *Gogy*, and next thing I knew he was calling me and he said he had too much going on-“

Wilbur gets his third call this hour, and declines it immediately. Hopefully Techno will get the message. “What a piece of shit. Brick his windshield.”

“Stop telling me to throw bricks through people’s cars.”

“I’ll stop when you start doing it.” That gets a small laugh out of Fundy, and Wilbur relaxes a little.

His relationship with Fundy is complicated, to say the least. He and Sally hadn’t ended things on pleasant terms- though it was definitely with no fault to either party. She was, he would say, *reasonably upset* to learn her boyfriend was the supervillain known as the Siren, and he thinks he was equally justified in not bringing it up yet. He thought he had much more time before she realized he wasn’t aging, but... whoops.

Sally had broken up with him and moved out of town, and Wilbur understood completely. So much so that he didn’t even keep tabs on her! Unfortunately, that meant that when she passed, no one knew about Fundy, either. It was only by genuine coincidence that Wilbur had heard about the passing of one Sally Salmons.

He’d gone to see her home before it could be sold, bringing Phil with him for emotional support, and then found a child curled up in a cupboard, unconscious. An eight year old Fundy had been secretly living there, hiding away whenever the police or realtors stopped by and only going out by night to search nearby trash cans for scraps.

Luckily, Sally had never badmouthed Wilbur to him, and so it wasn't too hard to bring him home. What was hard was raising him. Wilbur was forever twenty-four, and Fundy was a mostly normal child, other than his fox features. He had to balance a dozen things- normal childcare, hybrid childcare, being a villain, hiding his immortality...

Eventually, he had to come completely clean to Fundy, and that had helped Wilbur massively- but it gave his son quite a few complexes. He didn't trust his father's love anymore. Even now, a decade later, they were still rebuilding that trust, which is why Wilbur was ignoring all of Techno's calls in favor of giving Fundy his *full* attention.

Except now he's getting a *text*. Which is... a little more concerning. Not that Techno doesn't text him all the time- the man types as fast as he talks, so he usually prefers it over calling- but while Wilbur's on leave? After multiple calls? This... might be an emergency. And if something's happened that he really needs to know about...

As soon as Fundy leaves the table to run to the bathroom, Wilbur checks his messages.

baby brother E>: you have to stop phil right now

baby brother E>: hes gonna tear down the house and build a new one

...what?

phil's favorite: what are you talking about?

baby brother E>: im not supposed to tell you this but phils gone off the deep end

baby brother E>: were getting a healer and phils suddenly obsessed with expanding the nest even though we havent met him yet

He repeats. What?

phil's favorite: WHAT DO YOU MEAN WE'RE GETTING A HEALER

baby brother E>: some kid broke into the house and is trading us a teenage healer for the death of a hero check phils texts for once

phil's favorite:all i got was a text saying 'good news' and then he never messaged me back when i asked what

phil's favorite: what do you mean a kid broke into the house

baby brother Ε>: exactly what i said

baby brother Ε>: he broke in and now he's living with us until we kill dream

phil's favorite: awww isn't dream your favorite hero?

baby brother Ε>: worth it. the healer can stop illnesses apparently

phil's favorite: wait why is a child living with us

phil's favorite: techno why is a child living in our house

baby brother Ε>: i have no idea

baby brother Ε>: phil likes him and the kid insists on staying until dream is dead

baby brother Ε>: im pretty sure dream has a price on his head or something

phil's favorite: don't let him in my room

baby brother Ε>: too late he went through it yesterday

“Everything okay?” Fundy asks, and Wilbur jolts, caught off guard. He didn’t realize Fundy had returned.

“Um, yeah. Just... business, you know.”

Fundy doesn’t know. Wilbur had offered, once, to show Fundy what they were really like, how the family business wasn’t as scary as it seemed, but Fundy had been so terrified that he didn’t try to push it- not even now, a decade later. Now, they tried not to bring it up.

“Oh... yeah? Is there... a problem or something?” Fundy asks delicately.

Normally, he wouldn’t even ask that much. Maybe he’s warming up a little. Wilbur distinctly avoids trying to find out. “No, it’s fine. We’re getting a new... business partner. One that’s, uh, going to be staying with us for a bit? Your uncle Techno seems pretty worried that Phil might be attached.”

“Oh.” And the curiosity ends there. Still, that’s an improvement, Wilbur thinks.

“Yeah. Techno’s trying to rush me to come home and stop Phil, I think.”

“Oh.” And despite how he’s actively trying to avoid it, he can still taste the disappointment behind Fundy’s words.

Wilbur scrambles to fix it. “No- that doesn’t mean I’m going to, I told him I’d be here ‘til the tenth so he can wait-”

“It’s fine,” Fundy says, *disappointment-resignation* .

“No, I’m not going,” Wilbur insists, his powers slipping just a *little-Believe-me* .

The tension eases out of Fundy’s shoulders. “Okay. Sorry, I guess I was just-”

“It’s fine,” Wilbur cuts him off, trying not to feel guilty. “I know I’ve fucked up before. I’m not going back until the tenth.”

Fundy smiles and goes back to eating, but soon picks up the conversation again. “Sooo, I’ve been thinking.”

“About where to get bricks to throw through your ex’s windshield? Because I have a supplier-“

“No,” Fundy interrupts. “About wanting to go visit Grandpa and Uncle Techno.”

Wilbur raises his eyebrows. Fundy hasn’t come home since he left for college- what’s changed his mind?

“I mean, I wouldn’t go immediately, because finals are coming up and my game’s new update is coming out soon so I need to be available to fix any bugs, but.... It’s been a while. And I’ve been thinking about... the Big Thing.”

Oh.

Ever since Wilbur told Fundy the truth, he’s been waiting for this. He offered it immediately- well, he said it was an option immediately, he wanted to wait until Fundy was an adult to go through with it- but Fundy was so thrown by everything else that they never talked about it.

They don’t talk about a lot of things.

But now *Fundy’s* the one bringing it up. Wilbur’s so excited. “Oh? Really?” he says, trying to sound calm. “Now would be a good time, probably. You don’t want to get older than me-”

“Wh- shut up, we’re in public!” he hisses across the table.

“Right, right-” He doesn’t care. His son wants to *stay*.

Wilbur has only been around a few centuries. He’s lost people, yes, of course, that happens when the people around him get sick or hurt or just age to death. But he’s never tried to have a *family* before. Sally was an accident, a fling that deepened so suddenly, ended just as fast, and then she passed before he could ever reconcile with her. Fundy was an accident as well- in a different way- but one he would never take back, one that he’s grateful for every day.

But every birthday has been a reminder of Fundy's mortality. Every growth spurt, when the streak in his hair started turning white, they were all little bits of proof that one day Fundy would be gone, and Wilbur's little champion would be just like every other human before him- rotting meat and bones buried deep in the Earth.

But if Fundy wants to stay- if he's willing to pay the price- Wilbur will never have to think of that again.

"That's... that's good. We can make preparations-"

"I just said I'm *thinking* about it," Fundy cuts him off, shoulders hunched up. "I want to ask Grandpa and Uncle Techno about it, since... they've been around longer."

"Sure, sure!" Wilbur will prep them first, make sure they don't say anything that will scare off Fundy. He can't let them ruin this. (Not that they would. Phil loves Fundy as much as he loves Wilbur, and even Techno has a small soft spot for him. But Wilbur *won't risk it.*)

Fundy, Wilbur, Techno, and Phil- the four of them can be family for eternity.

And with that healer Techno mentioned, they'll really never have to fear for anything. He's heard stories of the healer Phil and Techno had before he was born, how they let her slip away into Death's grasp. Wilbur won't let that happen with this one. They'll *keep* this one, the Syndicate's permanent healer, keeping them all safe and *together*.

Never again will someone he loves go beyond where he can reach.

Chapter End Notes

you will never again get two updates in one day from me but uh. all the comments from chapter 2 inspired me a lot today and its my day off so i. finished this really fucking fast.

also yes wilbur does have techno's name in his phone as 'baby brother' even though techno is thousands of years older than him. that isnt about to stop him from calling him his babiest brother (for now) because techno is physically younger than him

(also btw, you can find me on tumblr or on twitter with the name/@ 'dioslab'!)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

(warning: this chapter mentions very unhealthy eating habits and starvation)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno can't wait for Wilbur to get home. It's only been two days with Tommy, but he's *exhausted*.

Tommy manages to walk a balance where he's annoying- *incredibly so*- but never enough to push Techno over the edge. He's good at reading people, so much so that Techno wonders if he has an ability similar to Wilbur's, and Tommy always seems to know when he's about to push things too far. He'll be talking too loud, or asking questions about the Syndicate, or *touching Techno's things*, and just as Techno starts wondering how hard it would be to find the healer without any information on them after Tommy's untimely death, suddenly Tommy will go silent. He'll drop whatever he's doing, retreat to the couch he's been staying on, and stick to himself for a few hours.

Those hours of peace are a blessing to Techno, but soon enough, the cycle will begin again.

Phil is no help. It's been forty-eight hours and he's already brought in Foolish to look at the place and start planning out an 'extension' that looks an awful lot like a second house attached to this one. It's *huge*. They have no business owning a house that big. It won't even be a cottage anymore.

Wilbur's no help, either. He's too busy with his kid to come home early. Well, he's supposed to be back tomorrow anyway, but Techno could really use the help- *Wilbur's* the social one, the one who takes over when Techno's too overwhelmed. This kid is *overwhelming*.

"-so I told Big Q, 'you know he's super not human right? Like that's not powers, that's *slime* -' and he almost kicked me out right there," Tommy says from where he's sitting on the coffee table. Techno's trying not to listen to him, and Tommy doesn't seem to care, talking to fill the quiet more than to have a conversation. "But hey, it's not like I don't *like* Charlie, he's a nice guy, even if he knows a bit too much, yeah? Little spy guy. You know if you hit him, he shrinks? You can carry him around in your pocket if he gets hurt enough. It's pretty-"

"*Thomas*," Techno growls.

Tommy lets out a sharp laugh, too loud for Techno's liking. He's already getting a headache, for multiple reasons. "Wh- that's not even my name! It's just Tommy."

"*Tommy*. Can you shut up? Just for like-"

“Aw, I was almost done!”

“No, you weren’t.”

“...nah, I wasn’t.” Tommy stares at Techno for another moment before moving back to the couch. He treats that thing like home base, as if he’s safe the moment he sinks into it. “How long until you guys kill Dream, anyway?”

“We need Siren back first.”

“Siren. Ew. He’s the worst of you three, I think.”

“Finally. Somethin’ we can agree on.”

That gets another laugh out of Tommy. This one, blessedly, quieter. “Yeah. Mind powers, yuck. I’d much rather punch something, yeah? Something destructive! Actually *powerful*. And he’s so dramatic, like was he in theater back in the fucking, sixteen hundreds or whenever Shakespeare was around?”

“No,” Techno says flatly. There’s an awkward pause for a moment, but when Tommy opens his mouth- “But he did have a stint in Broadway in the... nineteen hundreds.”

“Oh, you’re fucking *kidding* me.”

“I’m not. We were hidin’ in America for a decade or two and he wanted to give it a shot. I ended up movin’ across the country just so he’d stop askin’ me to read lines with him.”

Tommy snorts with laughter. “Holy *shit*- ”

“Phil’s banned any talk of musical theater in the house.”

“Ha! I’ll keep that in mind, big man.” Tommy seems a little more comfortable now... and surprisingly, so is Techno, his headache receding a bit.

It’s blessedly quiet for a few minutes, the only sounds being Techno turning the pages of his book, and the creak of the couch whenever Tommy shifts. It’s not long before there’s an interruption, though it’s not by more talking for once.

Instead, Tommy’s stomach growls. The second half of the noise is covered up by a louder creak as Tommy bounces on the couch- is it deliberate? Trying to hide his stomach growling? Techno looks over at him, but Tommy isn’t looking back.

“...you had lunch. Right?” He’s pretty sure Phil would have told Tommy he had free reign of the kitchen. If Phil thought to, anyway. Tommy hasn’t joined them for meals, thankfully, so it’s a time for the two of them to talk, or even just sit in silence, but the kid must be eating.

But Tommy doesn’t say so. He doesn’t even nod. Instead, he reaches out for the TV remote, turning on the television and flicking through some channels.

“Tommy,” Techno repeats, a little louder, and Tommy turns up the volume. He huffs and gets to his feet. Tommy brings his feet up onto the couch, curling up-

Home base.

Yeah, right. That’s not going to stop Technoblade. He pulls the remote out of Tommy’s hands, shutting off the TV. “Didn’t Phil tell you what you could eat?”

Tommy looks at him again, his expression... bored? Annoyed? He’s not sure. “I didn’t ask, big man.”

“...so what have you been. Eating.”

Tommy shrugs. “Nothing yet.”

“Oh.” Techno falls quiet. “Phil’s going to kill you. An’ possibly himself. Come on, we’re getting you something to eat.” He drops a hand onto Tommy’s shoulder, ignoring how he stiffens, and drags him up to his feet.

Now that he’s paying attention to something besides the words that Tommy’s constantly spewing out, he can see the signs of malnutrition. He’s skinny, too skinny, and he’s shaking a little too, though Techno isn’t sure if that’s from hunger or fear. If he hasn’t eaten since before he got here, then when *was* his last meal?

“You’ve been drinkin’ at least, right?”

“Fucking- yeah, obviously,” Tommy grumbles as he’s led into the kitchen. He eyes the room warily, as if Techno is storing torture devices under the sink. “What am I allowed to have?”

“Eh... pretty much whatever. Except Siren’s snacks, those are all in this cabinet-” he taps it. “Or the second shelf in the fridge. Me ‘n Phil aren’t too picky, an’ we grow a lot of our own vegetables, so you won’t be eatin’ us out of house and home.” Even if he might literally annoy Techno out of house and home. After they have their healer, he thinks he’s going to go on a vacation.

“Wait, I can have *whatever*? ” Tommy immediately opens a cabinet and starts looking.

“Well, when Phil finds out you haven’t been eatin’, he’s gonna want to make sure you’ve got balanced meals or somethin’ like that. Otherwise, yeah.”

Tommy starts going through multiple cabinets, then the fridge, and then the pantry. “...why are there two hundred fucking potatoes in here.”

“Like I said. We grow our own stuff.”

He looks at Techno. Then back at the pantry. Then, he carefully shuts the door. “Cool. I’m having bread.”

“Balanced meals-”

“Yeah, I haven’t had a *meal* in like two weeks. Unless you want me to puke all over your kitchen from overeating, I’m having bread.” Tommy finds their bread box and pulls out a few pieces of white bread. Absolutely no nutritional value. He’s probably right that that’s all he can stomach-

“Two weeks,” Techno repeats.

“Yeah. I mean, I don’t even know if that counts. Like, what is a meal? What constitutes a ‘meal’, right? If it’s eating ‘til you’re full, then it’s only been a few days, but if it’s like... fucking, multiple things, or like a balanced whatever, then two weeks. If it has to be a lot of food and also something I didn’t throw up after, then like- ohhh fuck, I don’t know,” Tommy laughs, as if this isn’t all *horrifying*. “Uhhh, two months?”

Tommy talks a lot, but he never says *anything*. As much as he won’t shut up about Quackity or Phil’s manga or Techno’s aesthetic, they don’t know anything about him personally. It’s clear now, though, wherever he came from, it wasn’t good.

He can never let Phil know, or they’ll never get rid of him. “Right. Well. Eat while you’re here. If Phil thinks you’re starvin’, he’ll hover over you like a mother bird.”

That gets another snort out of Tommy. “The Angel of Death really doesn’t fit his name.”

“He does. But not when it comes to kids.”

“Hey, I’m fucking *sixteen*, not a kid,” he gets out in between shoving bread in his mouth.

Techno doesn’t even dignify that with a response. “What do you eat? You can add some things to the list on the fridge. Maybe Phil’ll tell the Siren to bring you back some snacks or somethin’ on his way home tomorrow.”

“I’ll eat whatever. Except-” Tommy pauses, and then finishes off the piece of bread he’s holding. “Nah, I’ll eat whatever.”

Techno eyes him. Is it worth pushing? Then again, there isn’t much to lose here. “Except what?”

“I *said* I’ll eat whatever.”

“Yeah, I heard that. Also heard you hesitatin’ before that. Like I said, you can have whatever here, but if we’re going food shopping we need to know what you *want*. ”

Tommy grumbles, ignoring him for a few moments. Just as Techno is about to insist again, Tommy speaks up. “Fine. I’m vegetarian.”

“...heh? But you’ll eat-?”

“Yeah, I will if I *have* to,” Tommy snaps. “If I’m fucking starving or whatever, I’ll eat some chicken if it’s the only thing I can find. But if I get to pick, I’m not eating meat.”

“...very utilitarian,” Techno comments. From the way Tommy’s nose scrunches up, he doesn’t think Tommy knows what it means. “I can work with that.”

So, the kid’s been homeless. That makes sense, though Techno wonders how he got his hands on designer sunglasses and gloves. It also makes sense that he refuses to take those off, though, if those are his most expensive belongings. He doesn’t get consistent food. Most weirdly, despite how pushy he is... he doesn’t take things unless he’s told it’s okay first. Or at least, not food, even though he needs it to live.

(Unlike the Syndicate, who could starve forever if they didn’t mind the hunger pains.)

All of this is adding up pretty bad. Techno watches him nibble away at the last piece of bread and thinks- how the fuck is he going to keep this a secret from Phil?

Chapter End Notes

techno be like i hate this child. i want him gone as fast as possible. clearly i have to take care of him so that phil doesnt find out what hes like and adopt him. i am not getting attached.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Phil waits outside the house, ignoring the crashing noise coming from within. Normally he'd be more concerned, but it's just Techno moving things around and Tommy getting underfoot- as much as Techno is complaining about the addition to the house, he's being very helpful.

Normally, Phil would be inside helping- or at least he would be distracting Tommy from bothering Techno- but Wilbur will be home any minute, and he's excited to tell him the news. His wings flutter, betraying his urge to fly up and search the road for Wilbur's car, but no, he'll be here soon, and flying out to his car doesn't mean he'd be able to tell him any faster.

It's not long before Wilbur's car appears, and an even shorter time for him to get to the house and park. "Philza!"

"Wilbur!" Phil opens his arms wide, and Wilbur crashes into them, hugging him tightly. He's only been gone a few weeks, which is *nothing* in the grand scheme of things, but that's a cold comfort when he's been missing his son. "How was the drive? How has Fundy been?"

"Drive was fine, Fundy wants to come home- and Phil, listen to this, he wants to talk about *eternity*."

Oh. Wilbur's been praying for this for years. "Oh, that's *wonderful*. When is he coming to stay? We're about to do some construction on the house, but if he doesn't mind it-"

"No, no, he's got finals soon-" Wilbur suddenly lets go of him and steps back. "*Construction*."

"Oh, yes- I have some *great* news-"

"Tech already told me some of it," Wilbur cuts him off. "You're rebuilding the house because we're getting a healer?"

He *told* Techno not to spoil it... he's a little disappointed, but it's fine. "I'm *adding* to the house because we're getting a healer. Though it'll be good to have more room if Fundy is moving back in, too! I've already talked to Foolish, we'll be getting more bedrooms and some office space as well, perfect for Fundy to work on that game of his-"

Wilbur raises a hand, cutting him off. "Okay, hang on, old man. This is exciting and all and I'm *really* looking forward to meeting the healer, but I've been on the road for hours and I want to get inside."

"Oh, right, right." Phil steps aside, letting Wilbur step onto the porch and through the front door.

"I *SAID* IT WAS THERE-"

“NO, YOU SAID THERE *WAS* A COUCH, YOU DIDN’T SAY I WAS ABOUT TO SLAM MY FOOT AGAINST IT-”

“WELL MAYBE YOU SHOULD HAVE ASKED, HUH, BLADE?”

Looks like they’re getting along well. Wilbur glances at Phil before heading towards the yelling, ducking his head into the living room.

Tommy and Techno are bickering- loudly, yes, but it’s just bickering. In only a day, Techno seems to have turned around on their temporary resident. He even made breakfast for all three of them this morning, rather than just for him and Phil.

“So, this is the healer?” Wilbur asks, loud enough to be heard over Techno’s hollering. Tommy turns to look at them, eyes wide when he spots Wilbur.

“Oh, no, mate,” Phil corrects him immediately. “This is their liaison. Tommy is here for, uh, immunity? Just until we’ve paid our part. Anyway, Tommy, this is my son-“

“Wilbur Soot,” Tommy finished for him, although that definitely wasn’t how Phil was going to end that sentence.

Without missing a beat, Wilbur turns to Phil. “*Phlllll*, who told this gremlin my name?” As he speaks, Phil feels a sudden sense of anxiety and... reverence?

Wilbur’s powers have always been interesting. The public only knows about half of it- how he can push feelings and thoughts into people’s minds, coerce them into believing their actions are their own even as he puppeteers them. They don’t know that he can also *sense* emotions. As long as someone is speaking, he can feel their emotions behind those words.

Right now, he’s reflecting Tommy’s feelings- sensing whatever Tommy is feeling, and then using the other half of his powers to push the same emotions into Phil’s mind- something they often use in interrogations or espionage. It’s incredibly useful, letting Phil instantly know when something is working, or if the person is lying, though it feels a bit overkill to use on a teenager like this.

But.... Anxiety Phil understands. Of course Tommy’s anxious- Techno and Phil are violent, but Wilbur is a whole other breed of dangerous, comparatively. Reverence? He can’t understand where that would come from.

“We didn’t,” Techno says gruffly, breaking Phil out of his thoughts. “Tommy. How do you know his name?”

“I’m from L’manburg,” Tommy says. When they look at him blankly, he elaborates. “There are lessons on the founders of L’manburg. There’s *paintings*, king, it’s not hard to pick out the one that’s literally identical to you. Plus, you’ve got kind of a paper trail.”

“A... paper trail?” Wilbur questions.

“Yeah. Like, these two are too old for there to be records of ‘em, but not you. Born in the Antarctic Empire to Kristin and Phillip Soot, big ol’ mass murder spree when the Empire fell,

ran off to get some land, named it L'manburg, left when people started calling you a demon, and then-" Tommy wrinkles his nose. "Why the hell do I know your whole life story? Anyway, you can find some stuff past that, too. Will Gold the druglord- great work on that one, very cool- Sootings the musician, Blade mentioned you did theater but I haven't looked into that one. Bunch of stuff."

"Tell me more," Wilbur breathes, looking *delighted*. Of course he is, he loves attention, and the idea that someone's researched him like this must be incredibly flattering.

Tommy's eye roll is evident even through his sunglasses. "It's literally your life, I'm pretty sure you'd know more than me."

"Yeah, but I want to know what else you know! It's important, for- security reasons!"

He groans, crossing his arms. "Um... you created Blue, I guess? Which is what started the whole druglord thing. You right fucked up Newfoundland and Business Bay with it, which led to them being absorbed into Essempi. Will Gold disappeared during the riots, but then like two decades later Blade Records showed up and started promoting *Your City Gave Me Asthma*, which- big fan, king, actually used to have a vinyl of it-"

Techno starts. "You had a *vinyl* of *Your City Gave Me Asthma*? I owned the company and I haven't been able to get my hands on them since the studio was raided."

"Yeah, that and *Maybe I Was Boring*. Loved those things."

"Why don't you still have them?" Techno demands to know.

Tommy's mouth twitches before he smiles bitterly. "They got stolen. Dunno where they are now."

Wilbur just looks at Tommy, dumbfounded, before looking at Phil. "Where the fuck did you find this child?" With the question comes more of Tommy's emotions- remorse, longing, deeply stifled rage.

"I didn't find him!" Phil protests, despite how his heart hurts at Tommy's sadness and anger. "He broke into our house!"

"And I'm not a *child*, dickhead."

Wilbur ignores both of their responses. "Because he's weird and I love him."

"Oh, absolutely not," Techno says, looking frustrated. "We're not keepin' him. Especially if the healer is a kid, too."

"*Still* sixteen, you fuckers-"

"Aw, but that just means they won't take up much room! Especially if Phil is already building onto the house..." Wilbur looks back at Tommy. "Do you want to stay? We can offer, like-"

"*Nothing*," Techno interrupts. "We offer nothing because you're not staying-"

“Oh, you just wait, Tech-”

“*Tech?*” Tommy questions quietly.

“Don’t say my *name* in front of the *strange kid in our house-*”

“-this kid will be our little brother by the time that hero is dead.”

“In your *dreams*,” Tommy borderline snarls, apparently fed up with being spoken over.

...if Phil was anyone else, he wouldn’t have noticed how Wilbur tensed ever so slightly. It’d be imperceptible to anyone who hadn’t spent decades, centuries with him. But Phil has.

“Phillll,” Wilbur whines, but if any words come after that, Phil doesn’t hear them- they’re drowned out by the overwhelming wave of fear behind them.

A perfect reflection of Tommy’s own emotions.

It almost knocks him to his knees. It’s beyond fear, it’s *terror*, the type that would make even Wilbur shudder during torture. Wilbur doesn’t normally reflect something this bad to Phil, but he completely understands why he’s doing it- something is *wrong*.

...the idea of staying here must be awful for Tommy. Phil doesn’t know why- he seemed to be *enjoying* it here- but he doesn’t want to stay. Which is fine! Techno doesn’t want him to stay, even if he’s been warming up to him, and Phil... doesn’t want to deal with the mockery that will come his way if he picks up yet another stray child. If Tommy doesn’t want to stay, they won’t make him.

A small, traitorous part of Phil’s brain speaks up. Even if they won’t make him, they could *convince* him. A bed to sleep on, homemade meals, gems and gifts, they can protect and provide for him, give him anything he wants to keep him in the nest-

He immediately tries to shove those feelings back. Even Wilbur and Techno don’t know quite how far those ‘mother hen’ instincts go. Still, he already has two other children he’s taking care of to try to satiate that part of his brain, he doesn’t need even *more* teenagers to keep an eye on, especially not one whose greatest fear is staying, especially when he barely *knows* Tommy.

Maybe... maybe agreeing to protect and kill for Tommy in exchange for the healer was a bit too much for his instincts. Phil takes a deep breath, trying to settle down. “No more bickering. It’s about dinnertime- why don’t we just order pizza? I’ll have Ace send someone to deliver it.”

(The only unpleasant part of living so far from civilization is how hard it is to get modern conveniences. Phil so did love delivery when he last lived in a city.)

Tommy frowns a little, but before Phil can offer other suggestions, Techno speaks up. “Only if it’s from *Royale*, they’ve got a vegan pizza right?”

“Uh... I think so? Going on a vegan kick then, mate?” Phil asks, already turning towards the dresser drawer full of takeout menus.

“Nah.”

“...right.” He feels like he’s missed something, but Tommy isn’t frowning anymore, so it’s fine. “Well, I’ll order the usual and a vegan pizza, then.”

“Oh, yeah, leave me ‘n Techno with the child-” Wilbur teases.

“Stop usin’ my name-”

Tommy snickers before protesting his age yet again, and the knot in Phil’s stomach loosens up. It can’t be all bad for him, if just a little joking eases him up again. Maybe he’ll grow to like it here. Maybe he’ll stay. Him and the healer, two new fledglings in their nest-

Phil unruffles his feathers and goes to hunt down a phone. Pizza first. Everything else can come later.

Chapter End Notes

love the people in the comments last time who were debating what kind of hat tommy would wear. just for the record he will never in this fic wear a fedora even under penalty of death

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur is *so* disappointed.

With just one or two sentences, he's ruined Tommy's admiration for him. He's still not sure which part of what he said made him so scared, but every time Tommy speaks, he can feel that wariness. The borderline *distress* when Wilbur gets too friendly.

He desperately needs to know more about him, so he can start patching this up. In a way that doesn't require his powers.

Tommy knows Quackity, apparently, so he *could* go to him for information. But Quackity always demands such a high price- at least when Wilbur is the one asking. That will be his last resort, then.

There's a simpler solution, he thinks, so when Tommy slips into the shower after dinner and Wilbur's family has filtered out of the main living areas, Wilbur doesn't hesitate to grab Tommy's bag- his only bag, all his known belongings in it. If he's lucky he'll find a wallet, an ID, something he can use to research Tommy as thoroughly as Tommy has researched him.

....why is it full of flowers?

As soon as he unzips it, it almost overflows. There's a few types of flowers mixed into it, but it's mostly wilting or partially crushed sunflowers. Wilbur starts pulling them out, startled at the sheer amount and size of them- almost half the bag is full of them, but they're so small, like their growth was stifled. How did he get so many of these?

Is Tommy just a really bad gardener?

Underneath the flowers are just a bunch of dirty clothes, a bunch of jeans and copies of the same red and white shirt. They'll need to get him some more clothes while he's here, Wilbur considers as he sets them aside.

Clothes. Flowers. And at the bottom-

"What the *fuck* are you doing?" *Fear-anxiety-betrayal-*

"What is this?" Wilbur counters, holding up the cow plushie, the last item in the bag.

"Wh- give him back!" *Embarrassment-anger-fear-* Tommy reaches out, trying to grab it, and Wilbur hands it right over. "What the fuck is wrong with you?" He clings to the toy, his words reeking of *relief*.

"Techno said you went through my stuff."

“Wh- that’s not-“ *Disbelief-embarrassment*. “I was just looking around! I didn’t like, open your drawers or what the fuck ever!”

“Yeah, well, I was just looking around, too. What’s with the flowers?”

“I like flowers, bitch,” Tommy snaps immediately. *FEAR-FEAR-FEAR*. He immediately starts bundling the flowers together, though he refuses to put down the cow, and he eyes Wilbur like he’s going to try to take any of it from him.

“...is this all you own?”

Tommy ignores him for a moment, which he *hates*. Then, after a too-long silence- “What, looking for shit to take? There’s just this.” *Anger-fear-hurt-longing*. “If you *really* want to rob a homeless kid, you can have some of the sunflowers. Just *fuck off*. ”

“You’re not homeless when you’re staying with us,” Wilbur comments, picking out one of the least-crumpled sunflowers and examining it. “Do you like plants?”

“No,” he answers quickly. *Caution-neutral*. It’s true, then, but there’s still something so strange to it. Why is he hoarding them like this?

“But then-”

“It’s not any of your fucking *business* , is it? I said fuck off!”

“But *Tommy*- ”

“Quit harassin’ the kid, Wilbur.” He whips his head around, spotting Techno in the doorway to the living room. The sentence tastes of annoyance, but underneath, there’s the smallest hint of *concern*. He wasn’t expecting that, of all emotions. “I need your help with somethin’ anyway.”

Wilbur huffs, but steps away, still holding the sunflower he picked out.

“Thanks, king,” Tommy tells Techno, and Wilbur squawks, insulted.

“I thought you called *me* king!”

“Yeah, until you went through my shit,” he grumbles. *Anger-fear-caution*- how badly has Wilbur messed this up? Ugh, if he could just push a *little* relaxation, get him to calm down-

Techno can tell what he’s thinking, and grips him by the arm, pulling him back towards the bedrooms. “You know,” Techno starts when they’re out of Tommy’s hearing distance. “I thought I’d just have to stop *Phil* from adoptin’ him.”

“Why stop us? He’s- angry, but we can fix that, and then it’d be-“

“He’s temporary, Wil. You know how you do with temporary things.” The *concern* is more present now.

That quiets him. Techno isn't... *wrong*, per se. He doesn't like when the people he's fond of pass away, but that doesn't stop him from getting attached in the first place. It's his fatal flaw. "...I still want him to be happier," he grumbles. "The best I've seen is amusement that was still tainted with wariness."

"Of course he's wary. He's stayin' with a bunch of immortal supervillains."

"But he's working for us, basically! He's staying in our house! How did he just- walk in here without hesitation when he's so *scared*?"

Techno eyes him for a moment, and then sighs. "Probably he was leavin' something worse."

Oh.

"...yeah, I thought that'd make you even clingier. Look, I'm sure Phil'll leave him better than we found him. Or he's worked with Quackity, maybe he'll give him a place to stay, then you can see him.... Whenever you aren't blacklisted from Las Nevadas."

Wilbur whines- that wasn't his fault! Why is Quackity so *sensitive* about his fiancés? "But if he was here--"

"You didn't like Ranboo or Tubbo this much. What's special about Tommy?"

Wilbur pauses, giving that some actual thought. What makes Tommy so different from the kids Phil has unofficially taken in? "Well... Ranboo felt so *hollow* at first. His emotions were there, but they were... lacking, because he didn't have memories to relate them to, I guess. And Tubbo was basically dead inside until he settled in. Tommy.... Tommy feels *so much*."

"You sure you're not just lettin' that empathy of yours affect you too much?"

"No," he insists quickly. "It's about Tommy. He's so *angry*, but there's always so much fear underneath it. Something's wrong. I want to fix it--"

Techno lets out a low growl of *frustration*. "You said you'd stop tryin' to fix people."

Oh. He did, didn't he? "I said I'd stop using my *powers* to fix people. I can do this legitimately!"

"No, you can't."

"....why, Techno, is that a *bet*?"

"No. No. Not even slightly. Do not take that as a challenge--"

Wilbur claps his hands together, pleased. "Why, Technoblade, my dearest baby brother--"

"I'm literally thousands of years older than you."

"Yeah but you stopped aging at twenty one, so you're my littlest brother--" for now.

"Anyway! I'm so happy you've put out this challenge for me so I can prove you *wrong*. If

Tommy leaves us, he's leaving *better* than he is now."

Techno looks like he's going to protest further, but lets out a low sigh instead. "Whatever. Start by apologizin' to him, at least."

"For what?" Wilbur asks genuinely. Techno looks a moment from slapping him. "...oh, the bag thing?"

"*Yes*, the bag thing. Just because he's human doesn't mean you shouldn't treat his things like they're important to him."

"Yeah... yeah. Fine. I'll apologize to him." Maybe that will lower Tommy's guard a little.

Wilbur slips away from Techno, quietly making his way back to the living room. He hears something as he approaches, a low voice- the TV, he assumes at first, but when he gets close enough to make it out-

That's *Dream's* voice. Dream, the hero that Tommy is *avoiding*, Dream.

He immediately ducks into the room, unreasonably worried for just a moment that Dream *somehow* found their hideout, despite how he's been looking for years and has never found it... but it's just the TV, of course.

Tommy is watching Dream on TV. He whips his head around to look at Wilbur when his steps are too loud.

"-sixteen years old, with blond hair and blue eyes. He often wears sunglasses-"

"I thought you were helping Blade!" Tommy says, raising his voice to try to cover up the TV as he scrambled for the remote. Behind his voice is *fear-longing-longing*- what? What does that mean?

"-and was last seen wearing a white shirt with red sleeves. He-"

Tommy swears and manages to shut it off. The room goes silent as the two of them stare at each other.

"...sooo," Wilbur starts unsurely. "I wanted to say sorry for going through your things."

"You... what?" Tommy's confusion is evident even without Wilbur's powers.

"I'm sorry for going through your bag," he repeats, a little slower.

Tommy hunches his shoulders up. "You didn't have to- I *heard* you, I just don't know why you're saying that."

Wilbur blinks. He was expecting either a 'Wilbur of course I forgive you have some more sunflowers and I'll move in' or a 'fuck off and die'. Not... whatever this is. "Because... I'm sorry?" he says. Maybe that's not enough? "I'm used to hybrids whose belongings are precious, and humans who just treat them like things. I didn't realize you'd care so much."

Tommy tilts his head slightly. “You- what? Okay. Sure, what the fuck- alright.” *Confusion-resignation*. “You’re forgiven, I guess. Don’t fucking do it again.”

“...can I still keep the sunflower?”

“Well *obviously* you can keep the sunflower.” Tommy pulls his bag closer to him. “But never ask me for anything again.”

That gets a snicker out of him. “No promises. I’m heading to bed, g’night.”

Tommy ignores him. Wilbur casually walks out of the room, and then *sprints* for Techno’s room. “Phil’s office,” he hisses into it before rushing over to Phil’s bedroom to drag him out of it. Phil yelps in surprise, but lets himself be pulled along. As soon as they’re both in, Wilbur shuts and locks the door behind him. The room is soundproof, of course, so no risk of Tommy overhearing them. “We need to watch something.”

“What?” Techno huffs. “If this is your way of sayin’ you want a movie night-”

“No. Dream was on TV, talking about Tommy. He shut it off before I could hear much, but it’s got to be online somewhere already.”

Phil pauses. “...he was talking about *Tommy*?”

“Unless he’s looking for a different blond teenager wearing sunglasses and a red and white shirt.” Wilbur sits in front of Phil’s computer, pulling up the latest Dream news.

It’s easy to find- *#1 Hero Dream Begs The Public For Help Finding-*

“A witness?” Wilbur reads out loud. Phil and Techno crowd behind him, and he opens up the video attached to the article.

Dream stands at the Hero Organization’s official press release stage, in full costume. “*There is not a lot that I’m able to disclose about the following situation,*” Dream says, sounding like he’s reading off notecards. “*Approximately a month and a half ago, a citizen went missing after involvement in a villain attack. He illegally used his powers in the process, then panicked and ran away. As we were subduing the villains, we did not pursue the citizen, but we’ve since learned that he needs to be in protection for something he witnessed.*”

“*We’ve been attempting to track him down, but have few leads. We’re hoping that, by asking the public, someone will have seen him recently so we can find him. He is six feet tall, sixteen years old, with blond hair and blue eyes. He often wears sunglasses, and was last seen wearing a white shirt with red sleeves. He goes by Theodore or Theo, though he may be using an alias.*”

Dream sighs, his voice getting soft- softer than Wilbur has ever heard from him before. “*And Theo, if you see this- you’re not in any trouble. We just want to help you. Please, come to the Hero’s Organization, and we’ll protect you.*”

The interview ends there. The comments are full of people theorizing as to what Theo must know, or trying to give tips about where they may have seen someone who looked somewhat

like that... or people thirsting over Dream.

“... ‘Theodore’,” Phil murmurs. “It doesn’t suit him at all.”

“It doesn’t,” Wilbur agrees idly, though he’s distracted by... well, all of that.

“Month and a half ago,” Techno says, clearly thinking. “Anythin’ big happen back then?”

Phil hums. “I got into a fight with Pandas and 404, but I certainly wasn’t ‘subdued’. Besides that... Ace was hunting down his ex-husband’s stolen things, the Warden cut off a hero’s arm...”

“Dream was recovering from Techno almost killing him,” Wilbur points out. “How was he out ‘subduing villains’ when Techno broke all his ribs?”

“The Hero Organization probably has a few healers on rotation,” Phil sighs.

“*Or* it’s a lie,” he says, bouncing a little in his seat. “If he wants to look good while calling for Tommy’s head, this is the way to do it. Get the people to rat him out, thinking they’re doing something good, and then he’s got his hands on Tommy- and probably his healer, too- without lifting a finger.”

“You might be givin’ him too much credit,” Techno huffs, his words reeking of *caution*.

“We’ve known him for a week. You’ve known him for a few hours. For all we know, he *is* usin’ us as a weird Witness Protection Program.”

“I doubt it,” Phil says- oh, cool, he’s feeling bird emotions again. Wilbur can never quite piece those together the way he can with human feelings, even if he’s part bird himself, but it’s definitely some kind of protectiveness. Techno is so outvoted. “We’re the opposite of that, after all. And Tommy has no reason to trust the *Syndicate* over the Hero Organization, especially if he’s hiding from other villains.”

“Unless *Theo* is pullin’ a fast one on us,” Techno says, *defensive-wary-protective*. “We don’t know anythin’ about the healer-”

“Ace has confirmed their existence,” Phil counters. “And he knows better than to lie to us. Or to give out our *address* if he hadn’t personally confirmed it was the truth. I think...” he sighs. “I think we do need to find out more about why Tommy is here. Or... we just need to push up handling Dream.”

“Either way,” Wilbur says with a smile. “We should talk to *Tommy*.”

Chapter End Notes

wilby putting big brother mode into turbo for this one

writing might get slower next week, ill be working like six days in a row and i can only write so much on my breaks. alien boy is also a lil rough because im trying to figure out how to write ponk. sorry yall

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Despite Wilbur's best efforts, they refused to talk to him that night. Techno, for one, wasn't ready to have a sit-down discussion with *Tommy*, and Phil needed to drag Techno and Wilbur to his nest to settle his instincts.

...Techno might have to come to terms with the idea of Tommy staying around longer. He's just hoping he can get a Tubbo-and-Ranboo situation, where Tommy comes to visit once or twice a month and that's all. He's not sure how likely that is.

He gets up early in the morning, heading out to the kitchen. Tommy is awake, surprisingly- so far he's been sleeping in. He looks exhausted. "Mornin'," Techno grunts as he goes through the cabinets.

"...hey," Tommy greets him back cautiously. He's skulking around like a prey animal trying to avoid a predator's attention. He gives Techno a wide berth and approaches the fridge, opening it and putting a barrier between them.

The silence drags on a little before Techno speaks up. "What do you want for breakfast?"

"Whatever."

There goes that attempt. "Do you eat eggs?"

"Yeah."

"...how do you eat your-"

"Primes, just fucking tell me Wilbur told you about the news report."

Techno sighs in relief. "Yeah. We watched the whole thing."

Tommy groans and shuts the fridge door too hard. "I don't know what the fuck *Dream* said, but it was lies. And I'm not going anywhere until he's dead, especially since he fucking- put out a- whatever the fuck that was about me."

"Well, Theo, he-" Techno cuts himself off at Tommy's reaction.

Tommy *freezes* at the sound of his name, grip tightening on the fridge door as he stares at Techno with wide, terrified eyes. "Tha- that's not my name. That's not my name don't call me that don't you *ever* call me that-"

"Okay! Okay-" Techno throws his hands up, trying to placate him, but Tommy flinches violently and almost falls backward, hitting the back of his head against a cabinet door Techno left open. "*Shit-*"

Tommy *crumples*, falling to his knees and reaching up, pressing both his hands to where he hit his head. He's breathing too fast, but before Techno can panic enough to call for help, Tommy's forcing his breathing slower. Inhale for four seconds, hold for seven, breathe out for eight. Huh. Tommy's better at staving off panic attacks than Techno is.

Why the hell is he good at staving off panic attacks.

Why did this *cause* a panic attack?

"...Tommy," he says, trying to keep his voice low and calm. "Are you alright?"

"Just fucking *peachy*, " Tommy mumbles, still holding his injury. He looks so small, curled up like that. Someone so loud shouldn't look so small.

Techno isn't good with these things. He solves *problems*, he doesn't give... emotional support or anything. "There's, uh. Ice packs. Freezer."

Tommy doesn't respond. Instead, he reaches over to the freezer from where he's kneeling on the ground, and tugs it open just enough to feel around for an ice pack. He manages to pull one out, and presses it to the back of his head, hissing at the cold.

He doesn't stand up, but instead brings his knees up to his chest and leans against one of the cabinets, using it to prop the ice pack up without having to hold it. He also very strictly doesn't look at Techno, which is great, because Techno doesn't want to make eye contact right now either.

"Uh... I'll make... eggs."

"Uh-huh."

Techno has to scoot around him to get to the stove, but Tommy doesn't flinch this time. He's probably too busy with that head injury- Techno can smell the blood.

He keeps an eye on Tommy as he makes breakfast, but Tommy doesn't move an inch. When he's done, he plates the eggs and steps towards Tommy, loud enough for him to notice but not so much it's aggressive. He hands him the plate, and Tommy practically yanks it out of his hand.

Techno retreats, getting his and the rest of the family's breakfast ready. About halfway through frying the bacon- no, he doesn't care about eating pigs- he finally speaks up. As much as he likes silence, this is too awkward. "So. Dream. He said you witnessed a villain attack?"

Tommy snorts, not looking up from his plate. "I witnessed something, alright."

"...what does that mean."

"It means fuck Dream. Whatever he said, it was a lie. He's a fucking wrong'un and if he wasn't a hero he'd be in jail like a dozen times over, probably."

“...oh?” That’s interesting. Dream has always been the pinnacle of heroism, almost to an obsessive point. “What for?”

“You know. Wrong’un shit.” Tommy starts to get to his feet, a little unsteady. “Siren’s back, you guys are going to kill him soon, right?”

“Yeah. Just gotta sort it out first.” He watches as Tommy throws out almost half of the eggs he was supposed to eat. ...he swears, Tommy is eating less and less, when he should be eating more now that he’s getting more consistent food. He’ll have to keep an eye on that. “Anythin’ you can give us to help?”

“Not really,” Tommy murmurs before thinking it over. “He lives at the Organization’s headquarters-”

“Don’t heroes normally have their own homes outside of that?”

“Yeah. But not *Dream*. Anyway, he’s pretty much always there unless he’s patrolling, responding to an alert, or out with 404 and Pandas.”

When Dream’s dead, Techno’s going to ask how Tommy knows so much about him. Right now, though, he wants to be pretty careful. As much as he doesn’t trust Tommy, Tommy is their only connection to that healer. He’s not going to deliberately upset him- or send him into another panic attack.

God. He can’t let Wilbur or Phil know about *that*, either. How is he keeping so many secrets about this kid?

“Got it,” Techno says, setting the table for three. “You should run off before the others show up. Otherwise Phil’s gonna make you eat a second breakfast.”

“Yeah. Okay.” Tommy makes his escape towards the living room- probably the damn couch again- and Techno sighs in relief.

Tommy hates his name. He hates Dream, knows all about him, and Dream knows his name. Tommy’s gotten into Ace’s good graces. He found an unclaimed healer and waltzed right into the Syndicate’s home to get what he wanted with them. He teeters between competent and being a mess, he’s loud but quiet and so scared, he’s a dozen contradictions and a thousand questions in one.

Techno spent all night trying to find info on ‘Theo’. There was nothing. No sixteen year olds named Theodore from L’manberg who looked anything like him. He spread out his search in case Tommy was lying about where he was from, then he tried changing the age, but *nothing*. If this kid is from anywhere in the Essempi, then he doesn’t legally exist. He tried asking Ace, but the kid *paid him off* to keep his mouth shut- and the deal was so good that Ace didn’t break even when Techno threatened to put his eye out.

Wilbur is obsessed with being adored. Phil is obsessed with doting on others. Techno, he wants to know things. He can already feel his need to *know* Tommy, to find every scrap of information he can and piece them together until he finally understands this child who forced

his way into *Techno's* home, who charmed his whole family so quickly and so much that they don't want to let him go.

It takes a good chunk of self control to not stalk Tommy back to the living room and demand answers to his growing list of questions. That can wait. *He* can wait. When Dream is dead, the deal is done, and they have their healer, then he won't have to be so careful.

Techno chuffs, self-soothing, and waits for his family to arrive. It takes too long for Wilbur and Phil to join him, but he feels better when they do, though the table still feels a bit empty. He's never noticed the empty fourth seat at the table before, but today it feels just a little... odd. Techno ignores it as best he can. "We need to actually plan today."

"Plan?" Phil questions between chewing on a strip of bacon.

"The thing for Tommy. I want to get it over with."

"Aw, you gonna miss kicking Dream's ass?" Wilbur coos.

Techno huffs. "There will be other heroes out there."

"Yeah, but none with *good luck* powers."

"Maybe in a few centuries," Phil says. "You never know how often things like that will pop up."

"His powers aren't even-" Techno sighs. "I don't care about Dream. I just want this done so we can kick out Tommy."

The other two go quiet.

"...don't do that. He's leaving when this is done. We're already getting a healer, I'm *not* dealin' with *two* new people moving into our *house*."

"Well, Tommy has seniority-"

Techno cuts him off. He can't afford for Tommy to stay here- not with Phil and Wilbur already so taken with him. Not with his own fascination with him. It's just going to lead to everything going *wrong*. "Tommy is *only here* so Dream doesn't get his hands on him- or possibly the healer- before we can take care of him. That's it. He's a *contractor*, not our friend, not-."

"Damn right," Tommy says from the doorway, startling Techno- he didn't hear him arriving. Tommy looks a little calmer now, the bags under his eyes mostly gone and no longer smelling of blood. He must have cleaned himself up. "Are we talking about the thing?"

"...um. Yeah," Wilbur says. "The- plan with Dream, yes."

"There's no plan yet," Techno corrects him. "So we need to make one."

“ *Well*, ” Wil starts, in a tone that promises only bad things for everyone involved. “I mean, I had an idea.”

“...well, go on then, mate,” Phil nudges him.

He grins, smile too wide, too excited for a simple murder. “Dream is *so* careful, *so* routine. At least, until about a month ago. His patrols have gotten stranger, going all over Greater Essempi to L’manberg to the Badlands. I think it’s pretty clear he’s getting desperate looking for... someone.” Tommy doesn’t say anything, but he’s tensed up, looking moments from bolting back to the couch. “I say we use that desperation.”

Phil frowns. “Wil, I hope you’re not suggesting-”

“We could use Tommy as bait!”

“Oh, *fuck* no!” Tommy immediately snaps out. “Did you fucking forget that if anything happens to me, you’ll never get the healer? Because Dream getting his fucking *hands* on me counts! I’m not fucking-”

“Tommy, Tommy, hear me out,” Wilbur says, voice soothing. From the look on Tommy’s face, it’s not working. “The three of us stick to the rooftops. You walk around in a few back alleys, we call in a tip from a ‘concerned citizen’, and as soon as Dream spots you, we kill him. He won’t even touch you!”

“Bull- bullfuckingshit-” Tommy skitters back. Techno stands up on instinct, not sure how to fix this but unable to just sit and watch it happen. Tommy just ignores him. “You don’t fucking *know* that, he’s *lucky*, you could get distracted by something at the wrong moment or fucking, trip and fall off a roof, or- I don’t know! Something! And then I’m fucking- *fucked*, I’m *fucked*- ”

“No,” Techno growls, putting a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. Tommy almost collapses under it, but he holds it tight, keeping him standing as Tommy tries to fix his breathing.

“We wouldn’t let that happen,” Wilbur says, though he looks pale. Tommy’s emotions must have overwhelmed him. From the way Phil physically flinches, he must have reflected them over to him, probably just to share the pain. “...nevermind, maybe that was a bad idea.”

“No shit it was a bad idea,” Techno hisses, pulling Tommy a little closer to him. “We can handle Dream without putting the kid in danger.”

“Not a kid,” Tommy says, still shaky, as he tries to pull out of Techno’s grip. “‘m *sixteen*. ”

Phil shakes his head, reaching up to fix some of his ruffled feathers as he talks. “Yeah, mate, you’re *only* sixteen. We can still work off of abusing Dream’s change of schedule without your help.”

“It shouldn’t take too long to find him,” Techno says. “We just need to get some people to keep eyes on him, see if they can pin down any pattern. Then we just need an opportunity, sometime when he’s alone.”

“I’ll check with Ni- Nihachu,” Wilbur sighs. “Phil, can you check with Ace?”

“He said he was goin’ on vacation. Talked to him last night. Him and his fiancés are doin’ something. He’ll be back in a week.”

“A *week* ?” Tommy complains, looking a little more steady. He’s not fighting Techno’s hand on his shoulder anymore. “I’ve already waited a fucking week!”

“A week just for him to get back,” Techno corrects. “Then some more time for espionage, then we’d strike.”

“Fuck *that*. ” Tommy hesitates, and Techno knows what he’s about to say. Before he can stop him- “Fine, I’ll fucking- I’ll do it. But if- if anything happens, I’m gonna fucking kill all of you. I don’t give a shit if you’re immortal. I’ll do it anyway. And- you all have to be *right fucking there*, because if he touches me I’m going feral. I’ll fucking bite him.”

“Tommy,” Techno chuffs, not quite realizing what he’s doing. “You don’t have to-”

“Hell no. I’m not a *kid* , alright? I’m fucking- I’m the biggest fucking man here, I can do whatever the fuck I want, I don’t have to do *shit*. But if it’s that or wait who-fucking-knows how long, I’ll be bait. But also I want a knife.”

“Techno has a *great* knife collection,” Wilbur says with a small smile at Techno. “He should lend you one.”

“What? No. Those are my knives-”

“Wait, you have a knife collection? I need to see it right now. Where is it? Your room?” Tommy finally pulls himself free of Techno’s grip and bolts towards the bedrooms before Techno can stop him.

He’s about to give chase- he doesn’t want Tommy in his *den* - but Phil lets out a little laugh. “Just a contractor, yeah? Not a friend?”

Wilbur looks just as amused. “You comforted him like one.”

“Because you freaked him out,” Techno hisses, looking towards the door to make sure Tommy isn’t coming back. “That’s his second borderline-panic-attack this *morning*, we all need to leave him alone, not drag him into this. Besides, as much as he hates Dream, is he really okay to watch a man get murdered? You and I both know he’s not going to have time to get away when he’s playing bait.”

“...I think he *should*, ” Wilbur says. “I think Dream is the source of *all* that fear- if he watches him die, then he won’t be scared anymore, will he?”

“I’m not... sure that’s how it works for most people, mate,” Phil says.

“Well, guess we’ll find out!” Wilbur looks far too happy for having driven his new passion project to a panic attack.

There's a loud clattering in the distance, and Techno is immediately reminded that *the kid is touching his things*.

Suddenly he has more important things to worry about.

Chapter End Notes

wilbur: how do i get the child to like me again

wilbur: ah, i know. kill his worst enemy in front of him. this will surely make me his favorite.

ive got the next chapter mostly ready, should drop it this afternoon

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For all Techno claims to dislike Tommy, Phil is fairly sure that he's quickly developing a soft spot for him. After all, he's rarely seen Techno share pieces of his hoard before, and yet when Tommy exited Techno's room, he left it holding an ornate dagger- not one of Techno's favorites, but still one of *his*.

Then Tommy started slashing it around like an idiot, and Techno took it a step further, showing him the best way to hold and stab with it, and then giving him a lesson on vital points (to which Tommy started yelling that he 'knows all that shit, he's a fucking *expert* in stab wounds actually-').

Foolish begins construction in a few days. Phil would like to have this Dream situation wrapped up nice and tidy before then, so Tommy can decide which room he wants. Then, Tommy can settle in, they can meet and move in the healer, and a new era of the Syndicate can begin.

Though Tommy agreed to Wilbur's plan, he's still clearly pretty reluctant. It's two days before Tommy agrees to do it that night- two days of him barely moving from the couch, of him watching television but clearly not absorbing any of it. It distresses Phil, but Techno keeps pulling him away before he can attempt to soothe the fledg- the teenager.

Another reason to suspect Techno's growing fond of him, though it could also just be him trying to stop Phil from getting too attached. Again.

He's playing just as much keep-away with Wilbur, after all, which Wilbur just isn't accepting in the slightest. The moment Techno has his back turned, Wilbur is on the couch with Tommy, poking and prodding at him, chattering away to try to get his attention. Sometimes, it almost seems like Tommy is going to lighten up, and then Tommy curls up further and Techno realizes that Wilbur is pushing too much yet again.

And so, they need to handle Dream. Phil has his doubts about Wilbur's theory, but if Tommy really will feel better without the threat of Dream over his head, then of course he'll do that for him, healer or no healer. (Damn his instincts, getting him so attached so quickly. But he's just a *fledgling*, with no one to take care of him, too skinny and too abrasive, whatever miserable life he's dealt with forcing him to put up walls and oh-so-ineffective defenses. If Phil gets his way, Tommy will never have to wall himself off again.)

Tommy's only ready after a dozen promises that they'll be close by, so close that Dream won't get a hand on him. Wilbur even gives him a bracelet that he can press to alert them if something's wrong, and send them his location in the impossible case that they get separated. Then Tommy demands an earpiece so he can talk to them while he waits. Whatever it takes to ease his mind.

Wilbur has Niki ‘report a sighting’ as soon as they’re in the city, and the three of them break off from Tommy immediately. He quickly darts off, backpack in hand, and Phil quickly makes his way up to the rooftops. Dream may use the roofs to get around occasionally, but he doubts he will when he hears that the child he’s looking for is on the ground. And if he does- well, it won’t go as smoothly as if they catch him off guard, but Dream is no match for the three of them at once.

Phil watches at a distance as Tommy ducks into an alleyway. Techno and Wilbur are busy climbing up the side of the building behind him- his poor flightless flock- so he’s the one making sure Tommy is fine for now. Tommy leans against a building and slides down, still clinging to his bag. Phil turns on his earpiece. “You doing okay, Tommy?” he asks, voice soft.

“Yeah, ‘course.” He’s breathless, too much for just a short bit of running. Phil wants to scrap this plan so much, take Tommy into his arms and take him away from even the hint of danger- but Wil wants this to go off as planned, to show Tommy that they can protect him even from his worst nightmares.

“We’re right here. I can see you, don’t worry.”

“I’m not *worried*, ” he hisses, despite the hour of reassurances they had to give him. “Just- want this over with. I want to go-” he hesitates. “Back. To your house.”

...he’s so glad Tommy didn’t call it ‘home’. He would have broken immediately, Wil or no Wil. “Already got an alert that the Warden saw Dream out and about tonight. Shouldn’t be too long for him to make his way here.”

Tommy pulls the dagger out of his backpack, rolling it between his hands, before zipping his backpack up and hiding it behind his back. He *won’t* be involved in Dream’s death, Phil won’t have it, but if having the knife in arm’s reach soothes him, Phil won’t tell him to put it away.

Wilbur and Techno finally join him, peering out towards the alley. There’s a loud noise in the distance before a car alarm starts going off, and Phil flutters his wings. Is it-?

Yes. And god, it’s hilarious. Dream is jumping from car to car- and the media complains about the *Syndicate* doing property damage when their number one hero runs around doing shit like this- before jumping to the sidewalk right by the alleyway. “Theo?” Phil hears faintly through the earpiece. What’s more audible is how Tommy’s breathing speeds up.

Phil nods at the others and stands, readying his wings to fly down. The sight of him descending is usually enough to put the fear of *Death* in anyone, and he’d like to scare Dream before they-

“*Theo*, ” Dream says again, clearer now that he’s closer to Tommy. “Gods, Theo, I’ve been so worried about you.”

He sounds so genuinely relieved. It makes Phil pause, just slightly. Tommy seemed so sure that Dream was going to- what, hurt him? But Dream sounds so happy to see him again. The way Phil would be if someone he cared for went missing for who knows how long.

But Tommy is already hitting that panic button on his bracelet, despite knowing the three of them can see him. “Dream-” Tommy says, his voice breaking as he scrambles to his feet. Phil can see an arm twisted behind him, probably holding onto the dagger.

“Hey, hey, relax. I’m not mad at you, okay? Right now I’m just- gods, I thought you were *stolen*, Theo.” Dream steps a little closer to him. “You and the book were just *gone*, out of nowhere. We’ve been looking for you for weeks, where did you go? Are you alright?”

“I- I’m fine, Dream,” Tommy says, his head tilting up slightly- looking for them. But neither Wilbur nor Techno have made a move, both equally fascinated by this conversation. “I’ve been fine, I don’t need-”

“Good,” Dream sighs in relief. “I hoped my luck would rub off on you. Good thing no one found you, right? Theo, I don’t know why you left, but that was *dangerous*. If someone found out about you- you know you wouldn’t be safe, right? You need to come back home.”

“I’m not going back,” he says, raising his voice. “I’m not- I don’t want to.”

Dream stops at that, tilting his head. He reaches up for his mask, putting it aside- at just the wrong angle, so Phil can’t see his face, but Tommy can. “Theo, you’re coming home. Look, I know things have been... rough, recently. But you didn’t have to act out like this. I said I’m not mad, but I *am* disappointed-”

“Gods, you sound like you’re trying to be a *dad*- ”

“I’m not your dad,” Dream says sharply, before softening his voice. “I’m your best friend, Theo. I’ve been protecting you for *years*, isn’t that enough for you? How much do I have to prove myself to you, that I always have your best interests at heart?”

“You don’t!” Tommy shouts, loud enough to hurt Phil’s ears. “You don’t have my ‘best interests at heart’, you- you fucking *prick*. You’re not my best friend- you’re not my *brother*- you were my fucking *jailer*- ”

Even at a distance, Phil can see how Dream’s fists curl up, and it startles him into moving. He drags Wilbur to his feet, Techno following suit on his own. They promised Tommy that Dream wouldn’t put a hand on him, and they meant it.

“*Theseus*, ” Dream says, cutting off Tommy. “Don’t you ever speak to me like that. Not after all I’ve done for you.” Tommy shrinks a little against the wall, trying to put more distance between them despite how he’s trapped. “You’re coming home with me, Theo. Whether you want to or not. You may have taken the book when you threw your tantrum, but that doesn’t change anything.”

“...what?” Tommy whispers, barely audible even through the earpiece.

“I already memorized what was in it! And besides that- I’ve *used* it!” Dream steps even closer to Tommy as he *cowers*, no other word describes it so accurately, he’s *terrified*- “And you know what, Theo? If you really want to put up a fight, if you want to whine and scream? That’s fine. But you’ll learn to be better. I’ve heard limbo, the place your soul goes between

dying and being revived, is just like your own personal hell. And time isn't the same, either. A few hours of death would be days there. It'd be greater than any lesson I've already taught you. Maybe you'd finally *listen* to me for once."

"Dream- Dream, you *can't*. "

"Oh, Theo. I can do whatever I want." Dream reaches out, Tommy flinching and shutting his eyes before Dream's hand can touch his face-

And it never does.

Chapter End Notes

update.... 2!!

already halfway through the next chapter (which will be the end of the "first arc") but no promises on when it'll be released because i'm working every day until christmas. wish me luck.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

WARNING: THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS BODY HORROR

there will be a summary in the end notes

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur's so mad that Techno gets there first, the one to throw a knife straight through Dream's hand. He wanted to play hero, *just this once*-

It's fine. He'll get his hits in. "Hi, Dream," he says, filling his voice with *fear*. From the way Dream staggers back, it works.

"What- what the hell?" Dream reaches up, slamming his mask back in place, but Wilbur still gets a glimpse of his face- he looks so *boring*. Why does someone so plain get to threaten someone like Tommy?

Dream takes a step back as he grabs the knife in his hand, pulling it out- he's always been reckless in fights, that would cause some real permanent damage if he didn't have a healer back at the Organization. Good thing he won't be making it back there. "*Theo*," he snarls, *rage-disbelief*, still paying more attention to Tommy than them.

Tommy has already stepped to the side, further down the alley. He already looks so much less scared now that they're here. "I- I said you *were* my jailer, Dream. Guess who just got new ones, bitch!" *Fear-hate-SATISFACTION*.

They're gonna have to correct that later. They might *keep* him, but it's not a prisoner situation. Probably. Whatever.

"Dream," Wilbur sing-songs. "Looks like it's just you out tonight, huh? No Pandas, no 404 to back you up?"

"I don't need them to handle *you*, Siren," Dream hisses, gripping Techno's knife with his good hand.

"How about us?" Phil asks from above before dropping down, letting his wings slow his fall. Techno isn't so delicate, jumping down and hitting the ground hard.

"....Theo," Dream says, his mask turning to face Tommy. "What have you *done*?"

"I made some new friends, fucking obviously." Tommy's *confident* now, gripping his own- no, Techno's- knife tightly. "Turns out I had *options*, bitch."

Dream laughs, high pitched and *panicked* . “Are you fucking *kidding* me? Come on . All the work I did to keep you safe and you run straight to the Syndicate over a little argument?”

“Uh, yeah. Keep up, Dre.”

“...fine. Fine! I said I’d bring you home, Theo, one way or another.” Dream reaches up, pressing something on the side of his mask.

Tommy hisses. “Shit, that sends an alert to-“

“Really?” Dream snaps, and Tommy hunches his shoulders. “Whatever. The others will be here soon, so all I have to do is hold *you* off,” he tells the three of them.

“*Good luck* with that,” Techno says, stalking forward as he hoists his axe.

Wilbur only gets a glimpse of Tommy closing his eyes before the violence starts. The alley isn’t the best for fighting- Dream is cornered, but with Tommy behind him they can’t push him too far back. That, combined with the narrowness of the alley, makes it difficult to team up the way they normally would.

It also means that Techno, standing closest to Dream, gets the most hits in. It’s *so* unfair, Techno is actually going to be Tommy’s favorite when they’re done.

Dream is still parrying or avoiding most swipes of the axe, though his injured hand is mostly useless at this point. It’s pretty pathetic to see the world’s number one hero like this- but then again, he’s really only number one because of his friends that are always behind him. Wilbur wonders who will fill in the gap when he’s gone.

A nearby fire escape groans, Wilbur only noticing when a piece of it falls, almost landing on Phil. Wilbur has to drag him out of the way so his wing doesn’t get skewered by a metal railing. ‘Good luck’ is such a bullshit power- it’s just bad luck renamed. But luck is still luck, and power and skill will outdo it.

While Wilbur is saving Phil’s stupid ass, Techno swings the axe at Dream’s neck- it would be a messy cut, if it landed, but it would be enough. Dream would still bleed out before the other heroes could arrive, choking on his own blood, on his *knees* and *suffering* for daring to threaten Tommy-

It doesn’t land.

Because Dream grabs Tommy by the arm, pulling him between himself and the axe. Tommy yelps, his eyes opening just in time to see the axe swing towards him. Techno barely stops it an inch from Tommy’s face.

“*Dream,*” Techno growls, but Dream shoves Tommy at him- Techno immediately dropping the axe and pulling Tommy to his side- and jumps.

Wilbur realizes a little too late that Dream is jumping for him.

“ *You*. What did you do to him?” Dream asks, a hand around his throat, squeezing tight enough that Wilbur can’t even laugh the way he wants to. “What, did you make him believe that you were a *better option* ? Convince him he hated being safe with the heroes?” He only loosens his grip when he actually wants an answer.

Wilbur uses that opportunity to laugh the way he wanted to. “I didn’t use my powers on him at all, actually!”

“...you sound way too proud about that, mate,” Phil comments.

Techno snorts. “Yeah. Like you just got your thirty day chip for not psychically manipulating people into liking you.” Despite his nonchalance, his words reek of *worry* and... something piglin that Wilbur can’t sort out.

“Bullshit!” Dream interrupts them. “Theo isn’t *this* stupid, he wouldn’t run to the Syndicate-“

“Yeah, but I did, so *keep up*. ” Tommy’s still *shaken* by almost getting an axe to the face- reasonably so, Wilbur thinks. He’s still trying to play strong. It’s endearing, honestly.

“Bullshit.” Dream tightens his grip on Wilbur’s throat again. “Siren- no. *Wilbur Soot*- “

“Wait- wait, Dream-“ Tommy has gone from *shaken* to *scared-please-no*-

“Wilbur Soot,” Dream repeats, louder. “Theo will pick me.”

Suddenly, his throat burns where Dream’s hands are. It’s unfamiliar, a pain he’s never felt before in his life- and it’s growing, the pain worsening and spreading out from his throat. Wilbur chokes, reaching up to try to pull Dream’s hands off of him, but even when Dream releases him the agony doesn’t *stop*.

Wilbur falls to his knees, clawing at his neck on instinct to try to get it to stop, letting out gasps and chirps of distress. Flakes of blackened skin fall to the ground and he freezes despite the pain. That’s- that’s what happens when someone is *Withering*. Something he’s seen dozens, hundreds of times at his father’s hands-

How did Dream *do that to him*?

He can barely hear the screeching and growls, lost between his nerves burning and the ocean of *fear-rage-pain-pain-pain-pain*-

How long does it take to die from *Withering*? About an hour, he thinks, but already his throat is starting to burn out, the nerves *dying* and silencing him. He wants to cry out, call for his family, but he can’t. He can’t even stay on his knees, collapsing completely as the *Withering* continues to spread.

Such a short time for his nerves to die. Will the rest of the hour just be him trapped in his body as it dies? Will it be a relief, compared to the burning, the feeling of his skin falling off? Will it be a new level of hell to not even feel as his body falls apart until he’s just blackened bones?

He writhes as it crawls up and down his body, his arms and torso the next victims of the Withering. He can't *stop* moving, his body twisting and thrashing on its own. Each movement comes with more flakes falling away from him, and he cries soundlessly. Wilbur can barely tell when he's struck with more waves of emotion, it all blending together in a disgusting sludge- they're so angry, so scared for him, so aware he's going to *die*.

The burning completely overtakes his hands just as someone holds one of them. He tries to pull it free, the pain too much to take, though if he was in his right mind he'd *also* be terrified of infecting someone, of the disease spreading to Techno or Phil. They have a tight grip, refusing to let him go even as he does his best to try to escape.

Wilbur tries even harder to speak, to beg them to let go, but all that comes out is a breath. Everything is sounding so distant as the Withering starts to affect his ears, but he can make out yelling- Dream, Dream yelling- "*Theo! Theo-*"

"Dumb fucking bitch," Tommy says loud enough for Wilbur to hear him. He's the one kneeling next to him, holding his hand, oh god Tommy's going to Wither too- "I fucking *told* you you had a paper trail, that anyone could look you up and know your name, and you didn't even fucking- primes, Wilbur, you're the dumbest. Second dumbest, I think Dream takes first, thinking I'd pick him after he literally threatened to *kill me* -" There's a loud noise in the distance- the whoosh of an axe, the wet sound of it hitting meat- and Tommy flinches. "Oh, *primes*, that's-"

"*Tommy!*" This time, it's Techno's voice that he hears over the pain consuming him. It's clearer than Dream's screams, he must be closer. Wilbur shakes and tries to curl up, not wanting Techno to touch him, for his favorite brother to have to go through anything like this. "The *healer*," he roars, *rage-fear-desperation*. "Where is he?!"

"Wilbur, Wil," oh, and Dad has arrived, too. He can barely get out Wilbur's name through his chirps, *please-be-okay I-love-you-so-much* blending in with the *fear-fear-FEAR* so overwhelming it's almost as bad as the pain itself.

"We only have an hour- *less*," Techno says, so *furious-scared* that his voice barely sounds human, can barely be understood. "Where- how far is-"

"It's fine," Tommy says, squeezing Wilbur's hand. "He's going to be okay."

"He's- do you- do you know what this *is*, Tommy?" Phil asks, clearly already in tears. "It's Withering, it's not *okay*, the only cure is a healer, and not- not even all healers can-"

"This healer can," he insists. "Wilbur's fine, he's gonna be *okay*."

"Then we need to *get him* to the *healer*," Techno snarls. "Where are you *hiding them*? *WHERE ARE THEY?*"

"To-mmy," someone says, and everyone goes silent. It takes Wilbur far too long to realize it was him. But- his throat is gone. He felt it die, desperately tried to speak anyway, was *silenced*, unable to cry out or beg for the pain to stop- "Tommy," he says again, voice strained.

It's then that he realizes he can hear just fine. It wasn't that Techno and Phil were coming closer, it's that the burning *stopped*, easing up so gradually he didn't even realize the pain was dulling normally rather than just burning out as his body died.

"I'm right here," Tommy answers him- both of them- and squeezes Wilbur's hand. "Hi, Wilbur."

Wilbur starts to move his head- it *hurts*, his neck *hurts*, which means- he can feel it again. The skin stretches painfully as he tries to turn to look at Tommy, but he can move it, he's- he's-

Tommy is kneeling next to him. Their eyes meet through the sunglasses- they're dark enough that Wilbur has never gotten the chance to see Tommy's eyes, but he can see them now. They're *glowing*, bright enough to be seen through the lenses, and Wilbur gapes at him.

"Wh... wh..." Wilbur tries to speak, but the words are still slurred, his whole body too weak. Now that he's paying attention, he can *feel it*. He should be grateful- he *is* grateful, to be healed, but he can also feel his nerves regrowing, new skin replacing what flaked off. It's horrifying. It's such a relief.

His head falls to the side, unable to support itself for long as his body repairs itself, and he's stuck looking towards Tommy-

Towards their hands, held together. A bouquet of Wither Roses growing between their palms.

Chapter End Notes

summary: Techno is the one who stopped Dream from touching Tommy, by throwing a knife through his hand. Dream calls for backup and the actual fight begins, but Dream uses Tommy as a shield and a distraction to get to Wilbur. Dream reveals he knows Wilbur's name, and uses it to inflict Withering on him. Wilbur suffers horribly as his family kills Dream, but Tommy takes his hand and reveals that he's the healer, slowly curing Wilbur's withering. Wither Roses start growing as he heals him.

this is the end of the 'first arc'! i keep saying this but no promises on when the next chapter will be up. everything until here was strictly planned, after this is much more loose. ALSO, after this chapter, things WILL get more violent/earn the M rating, so watch out for that.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“We really shoulda realized,” Techno grumbles as he carries Wilbur back to their car, a little slower than he’d like because Tommy can’t let go of Wilbur’s hand. According to Tommy, they don’t have much time before Dream’s backup arrives and finds his headless, partially Withered body back in the alleyway.

“Well, yeah,” Tommy says. “I was barely hiding it, big man.” He pulls out another Wither Rose from where it’s growing between his and Wilbur’s hands and shoves it in his pocket. The thing almost makes Techno shudder, but Tommy’s holding it without a problem. They can only temporarily cause Withering, it wouldn’t kill someone unless they were already dying, but Withering isn’t *fun*. Is Tommy just... immune? Or is he affected by the flowers, but he’s constantly healing himself?

Either way, he’s angry with himself for not picking up on it. For not figuring it out. Tommy’s healer just *happens* to be the same age as him, also an orphan, was somewhere ‘safer than Pandora’s Vault’ (oh, Tommy considered them safe even when they first met?), trading himself for Dream’s head-

Dream. Dream, who threatened to kill his own- former- healer, and then bring him back to life, just to force him into obedience. If he wasn’t already dead, Techno would kill him again. And then a third time for what he did to Wilbur.

How the fuck did Dream get his filthy hands on Old Magic? It’s called that for a reason. The three of them should be the last alive capable of it, without some sort of guide- Dream had mentioned a book, but there shouldn’t be many of those left, and they should *all* be in one of the Syndicate’s libraries. Just another one of the many questions he’ll have to ask Tommy. For now, he just gently sets Wilbur in the back of the car with Tommy before heading into the driver’s seat.

Phil can’t drive back. He’s distraught. There’s no point to Tommy saving Wilbur’s life if Phil is just going to drive them into a ditch on their way home.

Techno starts the car and heads home. Wilbur lets out a groan in the back, but his voice isn’t so wrecked anymore- Tommy is healing him so *quickly*. How powerful is he? “Tommy.”

“Yeah?” he asks, sounding utterly unaffected by how he’s currently healing a man who, just minutes ago, was fatally ill.

He has so many questions. Too many to count. So why is the first one he asks- “Why did Dream do that?”

“...uh... which part, big man?”

“He Withered Wilbur. And himself.”

It had been slower on Dream, of course, but Old Magic always demands an equivalent price, and it was clear what Dream had paid as soon as he released Wilbur. Where Wilbur’s Withering started at his neck and quickly spread, Dream’s hands had only barely started to crumble when Techno beheaded him. Even if he escaped Techno’s wrath, he would have succumbed to the Withering. Except-

“He thought I was gonna pick him, obviously,” Tommy scoffs. “Dunno why. He’s a total dickhead. But it wasn’t much of a risk to him when he was sure he could get me to do whatever.... whatever he wanted.”

“Right. ...you used to be *his* healer, then.” It’s not really a question.

Tommy doesn’t seem inclined to answer it. He just grunts, and Wilbur groans again before shuffling a little. “Hey, dipshit, don’t move too much. You’re still growing back all your bits.”

“Tommy,” Wilbur whispers, and Techno shudders. His *brother* just went through some of the worst pain imaginable. Their healer has to grow back chunks of his *throat*. They’ll have to pay Tommy handsomely for this.

Oh, fuck. Nevermind. He’s going to be moving in with them. That’s payment enough.

“Yeah?” Tommy hums, keeping his voice low as he answers Wilbur.

“You’re... ours.”

“Mhm. That was the deal. I didn’t think asking for Dream’s head was gonna be *that* literal, but... y’know, whatever works.” Techno winces a little at that. Healers- they’re gentle. Tommy might not be gentle the same way their last one was, but he’s sure he didn’t appreciate seeing that much violence right in front of him.

“Not...” Wilbur clears his throat. “We’re not... jailers. We’ll- take care of. You.”

Phil trills involuntarily- *damn* it. “Phil,” Techno says warningly, but it’s too late.

“We will,” Phil says immediately. “Tommy, we’ll take care of you. Our healer, our-”

“Whoa,” Tommy cuts him off. “Stop? Stop. Cut that out.” Phil lets out a disappointed chirp, and Tommy huffs. “I’m your healer, yeah. I’ll work for you until I die. We’ll figure out rules and shit later, but like- you don’t have to *take care* of me. I’m a *healer*. I can protect myself. As long as Blade doesn’t take my head off or some shit.”

“I didn’t hurt you,” he grumbles. Something about that sentence makes him uneasy- probably just guilt about how Dream almost got him to axe Tommy in half.

“*Anyway*, I don’t give a shit. Okay? As long as you fuckers don’t hurt me, I don’t give a shit what you do, okay?”

Another trill from Phil, a distressed one this time. “We would *never-*”

“Dream did?” Techno asks, and Tommy falls quiet again.

Not for very long. “Told you he was a wrong’un.”

He grunts. That would be a *fourth* death for Dream, if he were to bring him back from the dead. First the beheading, then actual death by Withering for hurting Wilbur, then twice for his crimes against Tommy...

Hm. Techno shouldn’t want revenge so badly for something that doesn’t affect him or his family. He tries to put it out of his mind for now.

The drive home is a bit long, but by the end of it Wilbur is mostly, if not fully recovered. Tommy lets go of his hand as Wilbur stumbles out of the back of the car, Phil immediately rushing to his side to help him stay standing. Wilbur clearly doesn’t need it, but still leans into his side. “Nest,” Phil says, the word barely intelligible through the chirps he’s letting out. Phil’s beady eyes lock on Techno and Tommy. “*Nest*,” he repeats, insistent.

“Wh- him too?” Techno asks, waving a hand at Tommy, and Phil immediately nods. Tommy’s ignoring them, pulling the Wither Roses out of his pockets and weaving them together into a disturbed flower crown. ...that could be useful if he used it in interrogations. Techno might ask for it later. “Alright. You get Wilbur to the nest.”

Phil makes a soft pleading noise, looking between them both, but goes on ahead.

Techno turns to face Tommy, who’s not looking at him. “...Theseus.”

Luckily, this name doesn’t send him into a panic attack. Tommy just keeps weaving the flowers together. “Yeah.”

“You’re our healer.”

“I think we’ve said that like a dozen times in the last hour, yeah. I’m your healer now.”

“Theseus, look at me.” Tommy huffs, but looks up. He removed his sunglasses at some point in the car. His eyes are still glowing, fainter than when he was actively healing Wilbur, but they still have an inhuman, icy blue glow. “You are our healer, and *only* our healer. Wilbur is attached- *Phil* is attached- but it won’t go any further. You’re not our friend. You’re not family. You’re an employee. I don’t want any confusion about that.”

“*Good*,” Tommy says, almost a growl. Techno’s a little taken aback. “That’s all I *want* to be. I don’t need their pity, I don’t need *shit* except to be treated like a person. That was my whole plan, you know? I make the deal, I stay around a little, I make sure you aren’t actually worse than Dream somehow. If you were, I would have ditched before you even killed Dream- but you’re all okay. So we have our deal, but I’m not going to fucking- I won’t play along with whatever role they’re trying to put me in. I’m a person, I’m your healer, I’m not *anything else-*”

Wow, that is so much baggage that Techno has zero idea what to do with. He doesn't even understand it- not yet. "Whatever Dream did to you, we won't do. Our healers get treated with respect. I just wanted to make sure you weren't goin' to get confused just because Phil and Wilbur are, uh, affectionate."

"I'm *not*. "

"...and..." Techno swallows, struggling to say this. "Thank you. For savin' Wilbur. Even if it was just part of our deal."

"Yeah. Well. I wasn't gonna let Wilbur get got just because he jumped into *my* bullshit." He finishes the crown, and drops it on top of his own head.

"...don't. Don't wear that right now. Are you- immune, or-?"

"No clue," Tommy says, adjusting it slightly. "I'm not growing any more Wither Roses, so I'm not *healing* it... but I might be stopping it somehow? Dunno. I've never fixed Withering *except* people fucked up by Roses before."

"Right. Can you put that away for a bit?" Tommy huffs, but takes it off and shoves it into his bag. It's overflowing with sunflowers. "...what are those... Oh. Hunger?" Techno guesses, not liking the idea.

"Yep." Tommy almost leaves it there, but clearly hesitates. "...uh, you know how it hurts not to use powers?"

Hurts? It's usually just an itch, or an annoyance. "...yes."

"Yeah, well. I overused mine a lot at the Hero Organization because the Dream Team is full of stupid fucks, so I basically have to use them all the time. Or, like... I guess less now, because I haven't been using them so much since, but like... It hurts pretty fast if I don't use it. So I heal myself now. Starvation works best, because it's constant, *and* if I grow the flowers right I can get a snack out of it."

...they overused his powers. They overused this *child's* powers, to the point where he's in pain if he doesn't use them. To where he starves himself, because that pain is better than not using his healing. That's ignoring how Dream apparently *hurt* him.

Techno is going to kill every hero in the nation.

No, he's not. It's just Tommy. He's *just* their healer. Even if he was mistreated- even if the heroes didn't give him the respect he deserves as a healer, as a *person* - he's not family. Techno will *not* treat him like family.

Except for right now. "Leave your bag here. Phil wants us."

"...you mean he wants *you*. "

"You just saved Wilbur. Phil's keepin' you in the nest tonight. Especially because if Wilbur even winces in pain, his instincts are gonna go overboard, and he's gonna want you around.

...I'm surprised he even left us behind this long."

Tommy crosses his arms. "Look, I don't know much about birds-"

"Avians."

"-but the nest is a big fucking deal, right? Didn't you *just* say that I'm not going to be treated like- that?"

Techno sighs, annoyed. "Yeah, but it's a balance. I gotta satisfy their bird brains without lettin' them start callin' you family." He idly notes how Tommy shudders at that.

He called Dream his brother. Techno isn't touching that with a twelve foot pole.

"Look, it's one night. Maybe not even that long, if you can sneak out. But if Phil has to be the one to drag you in, you're not gettin' out of there for at least twelve hours. Maybe a full day, if it upsets him enough. You're goin'."

Tommy's fists clench and unclench before he drops his bag by the front door. "Fine. Fine! One fucking time. But Phil's gonna need to get his bird shit on lock."

Techno's been trying for centuries. Not gonna happen. But- "Yeah. He does. C'mon." He leads Tommy through the house, towards Phil's nest. They're already settled in, Phil curled around Techno's brother and playing with his hair- a poor imitation of preening, but the days he could run his fingers through Wilbur's feathers are long gone.

Phil coos when he notices them, reaching an arm out to Techno. He doesn't hesitate to approach him, and he quickly gets dragged down into the pile of soft silks and pillows that make up Phil's nest. Techno is uneasy, but gestures for Tommy to come closer. He doesn't like the idea of having someone who's practically a stranger in the nest with them-

But Tommy is their healer. He's already saved Wilbur. He can be allowed, just this once, to join them. To keep them safe and healthy, to be *kept* safe and healthy, to-

No. *No*. He needs to keep himself under control. Tommy is an employee. Just an employee.

Even as he watches Tommy settle in next to Wilbur. Even as Wilbur takes his hand again, and Tommy's eyes glow just a little bit brighter as Wilbur sighs in relief. Even as Phil reaches over, carding a hand through Tommy's hair, letting out more soft coos and chirps, comforting his flock, and seemingly counting Tommy among them.

Tommy is an employee. That's all he'll ever be.

merry christmas! or happy saturday to all who don't celebrate it. sorry for the delay on this chapter, i decided last minute to write a christmas gift for my girlfriend so i had to speedrun it. if you're interested in reading something by me that ISN'T SBI, i'll be posting that today too!

hope you enjoyed techno being a dumbass who is so so sure that he's not attached the way the rest of his family is

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

WARNING: minor self harm (not due to mental health issues)

if you want to skip it, skip everything between "So you need to heal a lot" and "You're fucking insane."

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Wilbur wakes, something is wrong. He can feel Phil behind him, the way he always is, and that's *comfortable*, makes him feel safe- but someone is in front of him, too. That isn't right. Techno is always on Phil's other side, not *Wilbur's*, so-

He forces his eyes open despite his sleepiness, and finds Tommy asleep in his arms. Oh. That's fine, actually.

Tommy. Tommy, their healer. Wilbur tightens his grip a little, pulling him even closer, and Tommy hums in his sleep. He has to stifle a chirp- *fuck* Technoblade, they *won*. Tommy gets to move in and stay with them- this gives Wilbur all the more time to make Tommy like him again!

And it won't be too hard. He can use the fact that he was hurt, that Tommy had to heal him, play on those healer instincts and make Tommy want to stay around and make sure he's at a hundred percent.

Wilbur promised he wouldn't use his powers, but he didn't promise he wouldn't be manipulative. If Tommy was a hybrid, Wilbur wouldn't hesitate to poke and prod at him until he imprinted, whatever it would take to make sure Tommy stays, *forever*. Unfortunately, humans aren't as easy as that.

Still, it can't be *that* hard. Tommy has been hurt, horribly. Wilbur and his family just have to fix that, give him safety, stability, *love*. The respect as a healer he didn't get from the heroes, the affection and care any child needs. Wilbur will give him whatever he wants, and then his healer will be so sweet, won't he? He'll feel Tommy's bright happiness that's been so stifled by fear and stress.

Wilbur runs a hand through Tommy's hair. Even in his sleep, he leans into the touch. How starved has he been of affection? He'll never lack for it here. He'll never have to want or fear or-

"*Dream*," Tommy murmurs, barely audible, and Wilbur freezes. It's so soft, the *fondness-love-longing* too sweet compared to anything else he's felt from Tommy so far. It tastes artificial- of course it is, he's asleep, just dreaming- and he *hates* how it feels.

“Tommy,” Wilbur says, keeping his voice low to avoid disturbing the others but still trying to wake him. “It’s time to get up, sunflower.” Tommy makes a noise- cloudy *confusion*, still mostly covered by the haze of sleep- and Wilbur lets go of him, not wanting to startle him too much when he wakes up-

But Tommy whines, the *longing* less artificial this time, and immediately leans forward, into him. How could Wilbur resist when he just promised to give his healer whatever he could possibly want? He pulls him right back into his arms.

“Sunflower,” he says again, sending *amusement-fondness-happiness* to him- yes, he’s not supposed to use his powers, but that’s to *manipulate* him. This is all genuine. “We can stay here if you want, but you need to be awake, okay?” He’s not letting Tommy think that *Dream* is the one treating him so nicely, not even in his actual dreams.

“Hhhuh?” Tommy finally starts to stir, blinking up at him. His bleary eyes are glowing- Wilbur almost thought he had hallucinated it last night, when he was dying, but no, that’s what he’s been hiding behind those sunglasses. As soon as Tommy’s eyes sharpen with recognition, he’s pulling himself back, out of Wilbur’s arms. “What- the fuck?” He’s too tired to really be angry, the words tasting of *confusion-longing-longing*.

“Good morning,” Wilbur says quietly. “Keep your voice down, unless you want to wake Phil and Techno.”

Tommy shifts up slightly, peering over at the two before glaring back down at Wilbur. “You’re all freaks.” *Longing-discomfort*. “Is it-? Blade said, uh, Phil would freak and kidnap me if I dip too soon, can I fucking go now?”

Wilbur turns around, eyeing Phil. It’s definitely fine, Phil would be a little disappointed Tommy left before he could wake and fix his hair, but it wouldn’t lead to Tommy getting dragged back to the nest. If it would, he would tell Tommy to go, just to have a few more hours with him later. But now? “I think it’s fine,” he decides, though he wants to keep him. Still, if he wants to get on Tommy’s good side, he has to indulge him, even when he wants things Wilbur doesn’t want to give. “Come on, let’s get breakfast.”

Tommy scrambles to get up out of the nest, and Wilbur does the same, albeit far more smoothly. He glances down at the nest, watching Phil and Techno doze curled up, and feels a pang of regret for leaving- but it’s okay. Wilbur’s left his beanie there, a little piece of him to remind them when they’re awake-

And Tommy left flowers, whether he realizes it or not. Small sunflowers are scattered where he had been sleeping. Wilbur snags one as Tommy leaves, tucking it behind his ear before following him.

Wilbur wants to ask how he slept, if it was nice to rest in their nest instead of on the couch, but even without Tommy speaking he can tell how tense he is. Instead, he just heads to the kitchen. “So, I could make us... something.” Wilbur is not an expert cook. “Or, I can call Quackity and bully him into sending us delivery. I think we’ve earned it after last night.”

“You mean *I* earned it. *You* just got yourself fucking *magicked* and almost died.”

“Almost dying means I earned it!”

“Whatever,” Tommy scoffs, *amusement-discomfort*. “Big Q owes me. I want fries. Just the greasiest, saltiest ones he can find.”

“Anything else? Burger, chicken tenders?”

“Do I look fucking five years old? No. Just fries. Besides, I don’t like eating meat.”

Aw, that’s probably that healer empathy. “Alright, alright. Way too many fries it is.” They do have a fryer somewhere around here- back when Techno’s potato farm first grew to its unruly size, and they were still trying to eat them all before they gave up and started giving them away- but Wilbur doesn’t know how to use that thing, and he does want to bug Quackity, so.

“Quackityyyy,” he coos as soon as Quackity picks up.

“No.” He misses the days Quackity would call back with a ‘Wilbah’, cooing just as excitedly. Eh, one day he’ll probably get that back. As long as he’s not too busy fixing up Tommy first.

“Why are you even picking up your phone when you’re on vacation, hm? Did you miss me?”

“I thought it was Blade calling. Do you know you’re on his phone?”

Well, Quackity wouldn’t have picked up if he used his own phone. “Nope! Anyway, Toms wants delivery and he says you owe him.”

“Oh,” Quackity says. Wilbur wishes he could make out his feelings over the phone, but, well, unfortunately he hasn’t figured out how to use his powers over phone lines yet. Eventually. “Sure. What does he wan-” Another voice joins Quackity, one he can’t quite make out, and Quackity’s voice gets more muffled as he pulls the phone away. “Hey, babe, no, I know, sorry, it’s- yeah, it’s real quick. No, they just want me to send out another delivery guy, it’s not really *work*- I know. I *know*. Karlos, baby, I know he needs us. I’ll be back in like two minutes, okay? Okay. I love you.”

When he hears Quackity get closer to the phone again, Wilbur answers him. “He wants fries. ‘Greasiest, saltiest you can find’, he says.”

“Got it. Anything else?”

“Well, I want-”

“That’s it, got it. I’ll send Charlie over.” Quackity hangs up without another word. Wilbur pouts- his fiancés take up so much of his time nowadays.

He turns back to Tommy with a sigh. “You’ll get your fries.”

“Fuck yeah,” he says, zero concern for Wilbur’s suffering. Looks like Wilbur’s going to have to wait for Techno to cook for him. Tommy just watches him for a few moments before speaking up again. “You’re not, like, in charge here. Right?”

“Mmmm, yes and no. The Syndicate doesn’t really have a hierarchy. I mean, Phil is our dad, so he’s kind of the most in charge? But generally we just decide things together.”

“...right. So I should talk to, what, everyone to find out how this is going to work?”

Wilbur puzzles over that for a moment before tilting his head. “I don’t really know what you’re asking. How what is going to work?”

Tommy huffs. “Me being the Syndicate’s healer, dipshit. Like, am I getting paid? Do I *actually* have to live here? When you guys go out and do shit, do I wait here or are you dragging me along? Do I get to heal myself? That kind of shit.”

Oh. Those are all pretty good- “Hold on, what do you mean ‘do you get to heal yourself’?”

Tommy pauses for a second at that response. “Uh, like... I mean, I’ve been healing myself constantly since I got here.” He brings his hands up so they’re visible, already holding a new sunflower. “I don’t know if you guys are dicks about that kind of thing, but Dream was a total bitch. Didn’t want me to ‘waste my powers’ or-” *Fear-pain*. “Whatever. I can’t even waste my powers. I can unbreak like, a dozen bones in a row, I don’t think healing a papercut on myself is gonna stop me from saving someone’s life.”

He wants to hurt Dream so badly. If he hadn’t let Dream catch him last night, if he’d been the one to rip his head off his body, if- “No, that’s fine,” Wilbur says, forcing his voice to be even. “You can heal yourself if you’re ever hurt. *Ever*. Why are- what are the... sunflowers- are you hurt right now? What-?”

Tommy drops it on the counter and leans back, further from Wilbur. “It’s fine, king. I’m just getting rid of hunger pangs or whatever.”

“Wh- have an apple or something, why are you letting yourself-?” Wilbur rushes to the fridge, opening it up and looking for something he can snack on.

He huffs. “I need to use my powers a lot. I was using them all the time at the Hero Organization, so...”

So he has to deal with the itch. Wilbur deals with it worse than the rest of his family- his powers are so omnipresent, if he tries to turn it off it drives him mad in a matter of hours. He can completely understand hurting himself to stave that off.

That doesn’t mean he’s going to allow it. “So you need to heal a lot.” He opens one of the drawers, pulling out a sharp knife.

“Wh- what the fuck are you-?” *Fear-fear-FEAR-*

Wilbur doesn’t hesitate to run it across his own upper arm. It’s not deep- even if Tommy can heal Withering, he doesn’t know how good he is at reconnecting nerves, and he’s not about to risk playing his guitar even to help Tommy- but it should be more satisfying than barely staving off hunger.

Tommy is still looking at him like he's crazy, but he's not scared anymore, just weirded out. Wilbur drops the bloody knife in the sink, stepping closer, and Tommy doesn't hesitate to reach out and rest a hand on his arm. The glow in his eyes gets brighter as Wilbur's skin quickly patches itself together, before dulling almost completely when he's done. "Any better?" Wilbur asks.

"You're fucking insane." *Confused-nervous* takes up most of his emotion, but there's an odd sort of *wonder* underneath it. Tommy's warming up to him, Wilbur's *sure*.

"Yes, well, it comes with the territory," Wilbur says with a smile. Tommy lets his hand drop from Wilbur's arm, now clutching a red poppy. "Oh, can I have-?"

"No. You already have some of my sunflowers, bitch."

"Wh- but that came from *my* blood!"

"Yeah, well, it came from my healing, too, so fuck off." Tommy holds it a little tighter. Wilbur may be bickering, but it's delightful to know that Tommy wants to keep a little part of him, the same way his brother and father do.

This will be so easy, won't it? It takes so little to get Tommy's attention and interest, and now that they've taken out the biggest threat and promised not to hurt him... well, Wilbur will have his healer agreeing to eternity in no time.

Chapter End Notes

DOUBLE CHRISTMAS UPDATE BABY

wilbur is not the best big brother. there's a reason for that dark sbi tag, even if i'm still feeling out how dark i want it to go. anyways, looks like quackity's busy with his fiancés! wonder why one of them needs him right now?

eh. it's probably fine.

hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Phil doesn't wake up alone, but he still hates when he slowly comes to consciousness with one of his flock missing. His baby's side of the nest is empty, and his wings flutter with concern before he really blinks awake and realizes Wilbur probably left to eat.

A few moments later, he remembers that his fledgling is meant to be here, too, and he sits straight up, ignoring Techno's sleepy grumbles. *He* shouldn't be missing, he should be right here, tucked under Phil's arm-

He gets out of the nest, rushing out the door and listening carefully. The kitchen, of course- He heads right there to find his baby and his fledgling laughing and... eating fries.

Huh. He thought he threw out the fryer years ago.

Seeing them lets Phil clear his head a little, and he manages to stifle his instincts more now that he knows they're safe and together. He stands in the doorway as he collects himself.

"Good morning," he greets them, a little quietly.

"Morning, Phil," Wilbur greets him pleasantly. There are about a thousand fries and quite a few burgers in front of him. "Want anything?"

"Where did this...?"

"Big Q owed me a favor," Tommy says, chowing down on a weird-smelling burger. It's fake meat, he thinks, and Techno's strange pizza order starts to make a little more sense. There's also a red poppy tucked behind his ear, matching the sunflower that Wilbur has on him.

"I see." Phil steps further into the room, grabs a fry, and takes a bite. It's ridiculously salty. This is in no way healthy for Tommy, he should be having a proper meal for breakfast-

But last night he saved Wilbur's life, and then let Phil bring him into the nest despite being nervous about it. This should be a nice reward for him. He can have something more filling for lunch.

"Is the Blade up?" Tommy asks. Phil can barely make it out, since his mouth is full of food. "Wanna talk about my *employment*."

"Your...? Ah, I think I woke him when I got up. He should be joining us shortly."

"Here," Techno mumbles from the doorway. He's leaning against the frame, replacing where Phil just stood. "What about it?"

Tommy finishes off his burger and takes a big drink before continuing. "Rules and shit, if I'm getting paid, that kinda stuff. Wilbur said you don't have, like, a *person in charge*, so..."

figured if we were all here we could get that shit out of the way up front.”

Techno groans, rubbing at his face. “I *literally* just woke up-”

“Yeah, and I’ve been awake, so catch up. I don’t even really know what you fuckers do- other than, like, what people say about you on the news. Or what the heroes said. Lot of fucking, biases or whatever there. And *not* the Kpop kind of biases- well, I think there’s some of those too, but like-”

Phil has zero idea what the fuck Tommy is talking about. “Well, we’re not exactly good people, mate,” Phil says, a little warily. He doesn’t want to scare him, but- well. Phil doesn’t know if he’s *ever* been a ‘good person’. He’s selfish, only caring for himself and his people, and everyone else in existence can either get out of his way or get walked over. Techno is equally vicious, though his priorities lie almost entirely in his own sense of morality and his beliefs. Wilbur is a combination of them both, as selfish as Phil and as opinionated as Techno- and together, the three of them have done a lot of harm.

But he doesn’t want to scare their healer. Tommy doesn’t really know what he’s getting into.

“No shit,” Tommy says. “I mean, fucking, villains or whatever. Probably like millions of people dead because of you over your billions of years of age-”

“That’s a little ridiculous-”

“So’s your lifespan, bitch. If I cut you open you’d have millions of rings, don’t lie to me-”

“What does that even *mean*-” Wilbur cackles.

Tommy throws his hands up. “It means he’s old as balls, Wilbur!”

“Alright alright,” Phil interrupts. “Tommy- what we *do* is whatever we like. And what we like often involves destroying organizations we disagree with... such as the Hero Organization.”

“And the Essempi government,” Techno adds as he approaches the pile of fries.

“And various governments,” Phil agrees. “Or sometimes we want something in particular, so we take it-”

“Techno’s crown is from the former queen of the Ocean Empire,” Wilbur whispers. “Ask how he got it.”

Tommy makes a shocked noise. “You stole your crown from *Queen Lizzie*? You son of a bitch!”

“Hey, she wasn’t appreciatin’ it enough.”

“How fucking *dare* you-”

“Can we get back on topic?” Phil interrupts again, and Tommy growls at Techno before crossing his arms and leaning away from him. Techno just looks confused and unhappy. “Tommy, you won’t have to deal with the... unpleasant parts of our lives. But we’ll need your help whenever we brush up against heroes, or anyone who could actually hurt us. Though, last night was probably the worst we’ve dealt with in quite some time...”

“Uh huh,” Tommy says flatly, arms still crossed. “Will I be going out with you guys?”

“What? No. Even if immortality doesn’t extend to immunity from wounds, we’re still more resilient than most people, we’ve rarely had injuries that are close to fatal. We won’t need you on the scene.” Phil doesn’t want him anywhere *near* danger.

“Mhm.” He seems unimpressed. “Am I getting paid? Or is it just room and board?”

Now that’s a more reasonable question. “Of course you’re getting a room here when Foolish is finished construction. For now you can, ah-” *Stay in the nest*. “We’ll figure that out later. There’s a few options besides staying on the couch. We’ll also supply all your meals, and... honestly, it’s been quite some time since we’ve had a healer. I’m not sure what the Hero Organization was paying you...” What are the market rates for a permanent healer nowadays? In the old days, they would just promise protection and meals, but he’s not going to cheap out on Tommy.

Tommy squints at him warily. “Nothing. They didn’t pay me shit. But I want to be able to buy shit, so I want some kind of paycheck.”

“We can get you whatever you like,” Wilbur interrupts. “I mean, we can figure out pay and stuff, but also we can just... get you things.” He’s *so* eager to get on Tommy’s good side. It’s so sweet how easily his son is accepting the new fledgling. Unlike Techno...

Though, Phil has often had this problem. He gets attached to some poor child, and then one of his sons will veto his interest in adopting. Still, Techno may be difficult, but he’s clearly fond of Tommy, too- it’ll just take a little time. Phil will help nudge him in the right direction.

Tommy pauses, still frowning. “There’s *one* thing I really want, but I don’t know how to get it.”

“We can do it,” Wilbur promises without hesitation.

“Wilbur,” Techno sighs, sounding exhausted.

“What is it?” Phil asks, and Techno manages to look even more tired.

Tommy doesn’t answer immediately, shoving more fries in his mouth. They *must* be getting cool by now... “My discs,” he says, barely intelligible through the food.

“Your what?”

He swallows. “My discs. The vinyls.”

Wilbur *beams*. “Awww, Tommy- ”

“No,” Tommy cuts him off immediately. “It’s not because it’s *you*, it’s just that the discs themselves are-”

“If you want, I can play for you,” he coos. “I’ve never forgotten any of my old songs, I have *so* many new ones too-”

“Shut up, shut up-” Tommy shoves him a little. “I want *my* discs. Dream fucking took them to punish me, and he hid them somewhere but I have *no* fucking idea where! All I know is they aren’t in the Organization’s Headquarters, because I tore that place apart looking for them before I ran.”

Phil hums, displeased. “You don’t know where he could have taken them?”

He huffs. “I mean... he probably left them with someone. I just don’t know who. Maybe 404, or Pandas, or his-” he cuts himself off suddenly.

“...or his what?” Techno asks. He’s clearly invested- he’s been wanting to find Wilbur’s old vinyls for *years*. The idea of some being right out of his reach must be bothering him. Good, maybe he’ll postpone that vacation he was talking about...

Tommy’s eyes dart to Wilbur, strangely enough. “Probably not... but maybe his boyfriend.”

“He had a boyfriend?” Wilbur asks. “...that wasn’t 404?”

“Okay, it’s *such* bullshit-” Tommy starts in immediately. “Because Dream is- was *so* in love with 404, right? Like it was literally painful. I used to make fun of him all the time because it was *embarrassing*, honestly, like total simp behavior. But then out of nowhere he gets this boyfriend, and at first I was like oh man he’s trying to make Gogy *jealous*, this is even worse- because Gogy doesn’t give a shit about anything, right? He wouldn’t have even noticed Dream was dating someone if Dream didn’t bring it up all the time!”

Wilbur laughs, caught off guard but immediately interested in this drama. “I wouldn’t have taken Dream to be that type.”

“*Right?* But nooo, he’d do literally anything for 404, like once Gogs didn’t want to make dinner so Dream literally ditched his patrol to pick up a sixty dollar steak for him. And then he didn’t even like it that much, so he made a second stop at fucking MrBeast Burger too! Embarrassing. But anyways, he started dating this guy, and it got serious way too fast, except Dream didn’t actually give a shit about him, right? Like he was totally just using the guy. But like, the guy proposed within a few *months*, apparently he wanted to on the first date- and he didn’t even know that Dream was Dream! So it wasn’t even that he wanted that sweet sweet hero clout, he *literally* just liked Dream that much- super clingy, I only met him once and it was super obvious- anyway, Dream maybe gave him my discs, and also he’s your son Fundy.”

“...what?”

„„plot twist, three updates today. merry fuckin christmas, i ignored all my responsibilities to keep writing because i was so inspired. thank you for all the nice comments and well-wishes!

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

WARNING: this chapter contains significant non-consensual power usage (wilbur doing the superpowered equivalent of drugging someone) and kidnapping. to avoid that, stop reading after wilbur says "calm down". summary of the rest of the chapter will be in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur calls Fundy for the half-dozenth time as he pulls into a parking space at his college. He's been calling almost every half hour on the road, but still no answer, and it's making him *very*-

"You know he's probably got, like, classes and shit, right?" Tommy asks from the back of the car. "He probably doesn't even know about *Clay* yet."

As soon as Tommy had confirmed that Dream had been dating his Fundy, Wilbur packed him into the car and drove straight towards Fundy's college. He'd had Tommy tell him more along the way-

How Dream had looked into Wilbur's past. How he'd found Sally, and thus the record of her son, and he immediately 'accidentally' met him. How Fundy asked him out and Dream accepted, both to spite his crush and to try to get information on Wilbur...

But Fundy never brought him up. Even when Dream brought in Tommy to play the role of his little brother- and oh, how Tommy reeked of *hurt-anger-longing* when he said that, it made Wilbur want to cry- Fundy still never talked about his own family.

Wilbur is proud of his son. He's also a *tiny* bit hurt, but at least Fundy never gave up anything that son of a bitch Dream could use.

Wilbur calls two more times in quick succession, neither getting picked up, but the third finally gets him an answer. "Dad, I was taking my finals!" Fundy sounds annoyed, he probably is, but Wilbur can't *tell* over the phone. He needs to see him immediately.

"It's an emergency. What building are you in?"

Fundy only hesitates for a moment. "Um, the maths department, it's past the main offices--"

"I'll be there in a minute, come meet me outside." Wilbur hangs up and immediately pulls out of the parking space.

“You’re gonna freak him out,” Tommy says idly. He doesn’t care at *all* about this, about how badly everything is screwed up because they just had to kill Dream, of all people, fucking *Dream*.

“I imagine telling him his uncle killed his boyfriend is going to freak him out *worse*, ” Wilbur says through gritted teeth. He loves Techno. He likes Tommy a lot. But the two of them could have just *fucked over* his relationship with his son-

He’s been trying so hard to fix things with Fundy. His son was so scared when he learned how his father could control emotions, so sure that everything they had was artificial. Fundy was so disconnected from everything after that, struggling to believe that anything was really real-

And now that they’re better, that he’s happier, that he was considering *eternity* , everything has gone to shit.

Wilbur screeches to a stop in front of the building. He’s about to call his son again when Fundy bolts out the front entrance, making his way to the car as soon as he spots it.

“What happened?” he asks as soon as he jumps into the front seat. “Is everyone oka-?” Fundy looks into the back seat, presumably to check that Techno and Phil are there, but- “Uh. Aren’t you-?”

“Nope,” Tommy lies immediately. Wilbur glances back at him for a quick moment- there was a bit too much *nervous-anticipation* there. Not that it doesn’t make sense. Everything is about to go so wrong, he just didn’t expect *Tommy* to care.

Fundy stares at him for a moment before looking at Wilbur, who’s already pulling away from the school. “Dad. You *didn’t*. ”

“Fundy,” he starts, not sure what he’s thinking yet, but Fundy interrupts him.

“Did you fucking *find* Clay’s missing brother? Okay, I’m mad at him for cheating-“

“He didn’t cheat on you,” Tommy interrupts. “Gogy isn’t into him.”

Fundy stammers a bit before continuing. “-okay, I’m mad he, he *dumped* me, then- but you can’t hold his brother hostage!”

“Oh, Fundy,” Wilbur sighs. “That’s not what’s happening.”

“I chose to be here, actually,” Tommy says. “Well, not *here* here, Wilbur fucking *threw* me into the car, but like, with the Syndicate.”

“Aren’t you like fifteen?” Fundy asks incredulously.

“Sixteen, bitch.”

“You- you were *not* this rude last time I met you-“

“Yeah, because *Claaaay* didn’t want me to be.” He makes ‘Clay’ sound like a dozen syllables. “Anyway there’s some fucking *news*, big man.”

“Tommy,” Wilbur hisses, pushing *annoyance* unintentionally. It’s not helping his case.

“Hey, why’d you *bring* me if you didn’t want me to talk to him?!” Tommy snaps, the annoyance infecting him. “Anyway, what the fuck are you gonna do, huh? *You’re* gonna break it to him that his ex fucking *sucked*? I’m the one who knows anything about it!”

“Hang on!” Fundy yells over the end of Tommy’s sentence. “What is going *on*? What’s the emergency- why are you *here* and not with-?”

“Your boyfriend was a piece of shit hero!” Tommy yells, throwing his hands up.

“*Tommy!*” Wilbur swerves harshly to pull over, and there’s a loud *thud* as Tommy’s head hits the window. “Wai- *shit*, sunflower, are you okay?”

Tommy huffs, reaching up to rub his head. “Why the fuck are you calling me that...?” His words come with *pain*, but everything else he’s feeling is... muted. It makes Wilbur feel even worse, because Tommy isn’t-

He shouldn’t be muted. His feelings aren’t dull, the way Tubbo’s used to be, they’re *loud* and *so much* and even when it’s bad, even when he’s scared or angry, it’s so genuine. Right now, he’s just... shoving down whatever he’s feeling. And Wilbur can’t *stand* that.

“Are you okay? I didn’t mean to pull over that fast, did you-?” he unbuckles his seat belt so he can turn around and reach out, wanting to see the bump, but Tommy presses himself against the window out of his reach.

“I’m fucking *fine*, primes,” he hisses, pressing his hand harder against where he hit it. His eyes flash for just a moment, and then he’s left holding a small cornflower. “See? It was nothing.” With the flower also comes *irritation-wariness*, no longer so dulled.

“Alright.” Wilbur sighs. “Alright.” He turns towards his son, who just looks all the more confused, his head turning between the two of them. “Fundy, there’s... this is Tommy. He’s, ah... the new ‘business partner’ I mentioned before.”

“...he’s fucking sixteen!” *Confusion-alarm-distress*- fuck, he doesn’t want to scare him off, he *can’t* risk scaring him off-

“I know,” Wilbur says, pushing just the tiniest bit of *calm*, needing to calm his son, his little champion, his flock. “But it’s okay, I promise. His... brother-”

“Not my fucking brother,” Tommy snarls, *FEAR-longing*- it’s so goddamn overwhelming to try to balance the two of them at once-

“I *know*, Tommy, but Fundy thinks- Fundy, Tommy isn’t actually Dream- fuck- Clay’s brother-”

Fundy cuts him off quickly. “What did you just call him?”

The car falls quiet for a few long moments. Tommy is the one to end it. “Surprise! Clay’s Dream.” *Wariness-wariness-wariness-* why is *he* so concerned about Fundy’s reaction? Wilbur is the one who has to break it to him that-

“But... but Dream died,” Fundy says quietly, *denial-denial-fear*. “He- Grandpa killed him last night. Didn’t he? Everyone’s been talking about it, how he was- he was found last night, he died of Withering-”

“Actually he died of axe to the neck,” Tommy adds, oh-so-helpfully.

“*Tommy*, please-” Wilbur hisses. He doesn’t want to do this, he doesn’t want to upset Fundy further-

“He, but that’s, Dream’s *dead*, he died last night, how could he- he isn’t-” Fundy swallows hard. “That isn’t, it couldn’t have been *Clay*, you- Dad, you *wouldn’t-*” *Denial-fear-FEAR-*

“*Calm down*,” Wilbur whispers, with the force of an ocean behind it.

Fundy and Tommy both instantly collapse, Tommy slumping against the car window while Fundy depends on the back of his seat to keep him upright. It was too much, too strong, but he *couldn’t* let Tommy make things worse, he couldn’t let Fundy be so *upset*.

“There we go,” he says, reaching out to pet Fundy’s hair and give him a little scratch behind one of his ears. That’s always made him feel better, ever since the first time Wilbur picked him up and held him in his arms. “Now just let me explain, okay?”

“Mhm,” Fundy hums, too relaxed to refuse him.

“Tommy is a healer. He was forced to work for Dream, but he ran away and asked to join us. We didn’t kidnap him, we’re not going to hurt him- it’s okay, I swear. But... Dream hurt him a lot, and Tommy wanted us to get rid of him so he didn’t have to be so scared that Dream would take him again.” Tommy lets out a noise of protest, *calm-confused* with some incredibly faint *distress* underneath it, but Wilbur ignores it for now, pushing a little more *calm* into his next words to keep Tommy from getting worked up again. “I promise, Fundy, I didn’t know he was the ex you mentioned until this morning. I wouldn’t have hurt him without your permission if I did.”

“Okay,” Fundy sighs, letting his eyes close.

“Do you have any more finals?”

“Mm-mm,” he hums a negative.

“Good. You said you’d come home soon, didn’t you? I think now is a good time,” Wilbur says, petting his hair one more time before starting the car back up. “We can pack up your things and bring you right home until next semester. You’ll see Phil and Techno again, you can ask them all those questions you had before, and you can get to know Tommy. Isn’t that a good idea?”

“Mhm.”

Wilbur keeps chatting as he drives them to Fundy's apartment- anything he can think of to keep the illusion of calm going. He's terrified of what will happen when he lets it fade. He dials it back a little when he parks, not wanting them so relaxed they can't stand, but still keeps talking, absolute fucking *nonsense*, he's just chattering about music and he can't even enjoy it because he has to keep pushing calm, calm, *calm*.

He rushes packing Fundy's things, shoving anything he can think of into suitcases- clothes, books, and most importantly a little plushie named Yogurt that Wilbur gave him years ago that he still has, a little proof that Fundy *loves* him despite the things Wilbur does, what a failure of a father he is-

It takes two trips to get Fundy's bags and computer into the car, and Wilbur is quick to start driving home. His throat is burning about halfway through, the nonstop talking running his voice ragged but he can't *stop*, can't risk their reactions *now*.

Wilbur doesn't even have to ask. His healer, as forcibly relaxed as he is, leans forward. Wilbur almost runs the car off the road as Tommy presses a hand to Wilbur's throat, and the pain quickly fades, his voice returning to normal mid-word. "-thank you, sunflower, you're so sweet, aren't you? So snappy, so angry and scared all the time, but when you've settled in and you're happier you'll be so *bright*, a light in our lives just like Fundy- oh, Fundy, sweetheart, I'm so sorry, I'm so so sorry..."

The second half of the trip is just apologies. He begs for forgiveness a dozen different ways, but they can't forgive him, not when he's making them so *calm* they can't even recognize that he's upset. He doesn't know how to fix this.

He needs Phil, who was his hero when Fundy first started spiralling, the one who got his little champion to open up and admit what was wrong. He needs Techno, too, Tommy's favorite for now, maybe forever now that Wilbur's fucked up so badly. Maybe for all of eternity- but he needs eternity, needs it for both of them, his son he's so terrified of losing and his sunflower who will keep them all safe.

Just an hour. Just half an hour. Just fifteen minutes. Just the drive up the road, Phil and Techno already outside the house, already waiting for him because he left so fast, without listening to them, if he'd just *listened* maybe this wouldn't have happened-

Wilbur throws the car door open as soon as he's parked. "Phil," he croaks, *desperation*. "Help."

Chapter End Notes

summary of the end: wilbur uses his powers to calm tommy and fundy, to the point where they're basically unaware of their surroundings. wilbur still explains to fundy that he didnt realize clay and dream were the same person and they only did it to help tommy, despite how fundy is too relaxed to process what he's saying. he then packs up

fundy's belongings and drags him back home while panicking about what he's done, still keeping them calm the whole drive. when his throat gets sore, tommy heals him without being asked. wilbur makes it home and begs phil to help him out of the situation he's caused.

....so.... my little meow meow fucking puppeteered his goddamn family. way to go, jackass. shoutout to the people in the comments who were like "oh wilbur thinks he's being manipulative but he's actually so respectful of tommy's feelings-" im so fucking sorry. wilbur is not a good big brother. not yet, anyway.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The world is a soft, pleasant haze as Fundy steps out of the car. Theo stumbles behind him, bumping into Fundy's side, but he doesn't mind. It's clearly just an accident, so it's fine. Everything feels fine right now.

His dad is saying something to Grandpa, but it's so quiet to him, and Fundy doesn't process anything he's listening to. Instead, he just waves to Uncle Techno as he grabs Dad and pulls him into the house.

Oh, the house. Fundy's tail swishes as he looks it over. It's been a few years since he's been back, but he's missed it. Even his happiness to be home feels a little muted, but it's fine. He steps forward, but Theo stumbles again and he looks back at him.

Clay's brother stands there, clutching a white rose- he's had it ever since he touched his dad's throat in the car. 'A healer,' Dad had said. Clay hurt him, he said. Normally Fundy would be stressed, disbelieving, *angry*, but the haze keeps him cozy, distant, and so he reaches out and takes him by the shoulder, gently guiding him inside.

His memories are a bit fuzzy right now, but he remembers when he met Theo. Clay had hyped it up for days, how close he and his little brother were- but it was okay if he and Fundy didn't get along immediately because his brother was *difficult*, in his rebellious teen years. Fundy didn't see any of that when he met the quiet, awkward teenager.

Theo hid behind Clay, and only spoke to Fundy when Clay prompted him to, or the very few times Fundy tried to talk to him first. Clay had apologized profusely afterwards, still calling Theo *difficult* and *rebellious*. Fundy had ignored how Theo bit his lip red and looked away, had assumed that he was just embarrassed. He hadn't seen him since, and he was too busy avoiding Clay's attempts to bring up Fundy's own family to even think about him.

But now he's here, with Fundy's family instead of Clay, and a tiny, muffled part of him is almost pleased about it. A quick final jab to Clay, who lied and dumped him-

And is dead now. The thought cuts through the haze, not dispersing it but still a shock to his system, the first thing he's felt besides the calm haze in hours, and he stumbles a little himself.

"Hi, Fundy," Grandpa says, his voice quiet. Fundy didn't even realize he'd come closer. "Remember your way to the nest?"

"Mhm," Fundy hums. How could he forget? It's been in the same room for years, and Fundy used to find his way there a few times a week. When he was little, it was his favorite place in the world, curling up with whatever members of his family weren't busy with 'work'.

“Good. You and Tommy head there, alright? I’ll join you in a bit.”

Fundy hums again and keeps leading Theo- Tommy? Dad and Grandpa both called him Tommy. He should, too. He leads Tommy to Phil’s nest.

It’s the same as it ever was, lined by one of Uncle Techno’s capes and some of Dad’s beanies and Grandpa’s feathers strewn about- and sunflowers. Not exactly the same, then.

Tommy makes his way to the nest, immediately lying down on one side of it, where the most sunflowers are. His eyes close almost instantly. He must be tired after the long drive.

Fundy settles in the center, giving Tommy a bit of space, enough for Grandpa to fit between them when he arrives. By the time Grandpa settles in, Tommy is already out like a light.

Grandpa pulls Fundy close, running a hand through his hair. ‘Preening’, he always called it, even though Fundy is a fox like his mom instead of a bird like him and Dad. It’s always comforting- not that he needs to be comforted right now, he’s fine, but- “Hey mate,” Grandpa murmurs. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine,” he says. “I’m fine.” And he is, really, but remembering that Clay is dead is making him.... Less. The haze feels less calming, more stifling, like it’s pressing down his thoughts and feelings. “I don’t...”

“It’s okay if you don’t know,” Grandpa tells him. “Do you know what Wilbur did?”

He helped kill Clay, didn’t he? But that’s not what he means, is it? His dad- he-

“Oh. He used his powers. Didn’t he?”

When Fundy was barely a teenager, his dad sat him down and told him who he was- who they *all* were. It made sense, of course- none of them had ever aged, they were busy all the time, they came home injured and claimed they’d ‘been mugged’ but those weren’t injuries you got from mugging-

Fundy was terrified. Not because he lived with villains, or because he was *related* to them, but just because of his dad. The Siren, who could control anyone’s emotions, force them into blinding terror or make them so happy it’s like they’ve been drugged.

How many times could his dad have used that on him without him knowing? How many memories did he look back on fondly without knowing that he’d been influenced by his dad’s powers? He couldn’t trust anything, especially not himself.

But if this is what it’s like- if it’s this strong, this overpowering- he doesn’t think his father has ever used his powers on him. At least, not until now.

“He did,” Grandpa confirms, still preening his fur. “It’s not okay, but he was just worried. He didn’t really mean to, he just didn’t want to upset you, and, well... Tommy didn’t tell us who he was to you until it was too late. I think it scared Wilbur pretty badly.”

“Grandpa... you *killed* Clay.” As the superpowered haze fades, he clings to the fear and distress he finds underneath. It’s awful, to be scared of his own family, but it’s something *real*. He *needs* something real right now.

Grandpa lets his hand drop from Fundy’s head, and shifts slightly to play with Tommy’s hair instead. “Tommy showed up while Wilbur was visiting you. He offered to trade us a healer if we killed Dream, and... we needed one. We’ve needed one for a long time. For peace of mind, at least.” Fundy hums in acknowledgement- Grandpa and Uncle Techno have always been unaffected when they talk about people who have died, but his dad never is. He probably wanted a healer more than anything. “We didn’t realize at the time that Tommy was trading himself. He had been a healer for the Hero Organization.”

....what? “But he’s only sixteen.” He doesn’t know much about heroes, other than what’s on TV or what his classmates mention offhand, but surely they don’t let *teenagers* run around healing whatever screwed up injuries their heroes get on duty?

“He is,” Grandpa sighs. “He hasn’t told us how long he worked for them, but... it wasn’t good for him. When he ran into Dream last night, Dream threatened to kill him if he didn’t come back. Tommy was terrified.”

Clay loved Theo. He was so excited to introduce Fundy to him, and even if he was a little forceful about trying to make Theo be *polite*...

But ‘Theo’ wasn’t real, was he? It was a lie, an illusion to... to get something out of Fundy. Who knows what it was for, but it was for *something*, because it can’t be a coincidence that *Dream* just happened to date *Siren’s* son.

“He... was going to hurt him?”

“He *did* hurt Wilbur.” Fundy tenses in surprise- he shouldn’t be surprised, it was heroes against villains, but the idea of Clay hurting *his dad*... “You need to be calm when I tell you this.”

“What..?” Oh, he *doesn’t* like his grandpa telling him to be calm when they’re already discussing his boyfriend’s death semi-calmly.

Grandpa sighs. “We stepped in to help get Tommy away from him, and... Dream was capable of Old Magic. He cursed Wilbur with Withering.”

Oh. *Oh*.

Fundy has never seen Withering in person. His family always kept the business away from him, and Grandpa especially was careful to avoid Fundy seeing anything about it on TV. His only experience with it was a quick section on it in high school, mostly warning against Wither Roses. Even that nonfatal version of it was *horrifying*.

That happening to his dad- he can’t imagine it. He *won’t*.

“If it wasn’t for Tommy, we could have lost him,” Grandpa says softly. “I’m sure almost dying last night didn’t help Wilbur’s mental state today, either.”

He knows what Grandpa is doing- trying to convince him that his dad didn’t mean it. That because it was an ‘accident’, even if it wasn’t really *okay*, it’s something that should be forgiven. Fundy doesn’t think he’s wrong, but he still doesn’t like it. “Yeah. But- are you really *sure* that that was- I mean, Clay was always so *nice* to me.” Except when he ignored him for ‘Gogy’, except when his brother was missing, except when Fundy put off Clay meeting the family and he thought Fundy was ashamed of him- “He loved Th-Tommy. He was excited for us to meet, he talked his little brother up so much, and even if Tommy was kind of quiet-”

“Tommy isn’t a quiet person. If he was then... it’s probably because Dream made him. He wasn’t being treated well with the heroes. I mean, that’s obvious, since his first choice of backup was, well, us. If Dream was nice... it was likely just an act.” Fundy’s expression must show his distress, and Grandpa coos, clearly trying to soothe him. “Oh, mate, I know it’s awful, but he’s gone now.”

“No, that’s not- Grandpa, I can’t just- He treated me well, until- I guess until Theo- Tommy- ran away. Even if Clay wasn’t- I can’t just *accept* that my family *killed* him-” He sits up, letting the anger get to him, letting it wash away the last remnants of his father’s powers.

“It’s better than beating yourself up about it,” Grandpa says, his voice still calm even though they’re talking about a *dead man*. “Fundy... Wilbur said you were considering eternity? That’s the biggest thing you need to think about. Everyone will die someday- everyone but us. Death is going to lose its meaning eventually. The sooner you understand that, the easier it is to accept.”

That’s such a *bullshit* response that he throws his hands up. “I don’t even know if I really want it! I just- it’s *Dad!* He never said it, but I *know* he wants me to. And he’s been trying, you know? He’s-” He groans, running his hands through his hair and ruining all the preening Grandpa did. “After- after he finally told me about the... Syndicate... he’s been trying so hard to make up for it. It’s... it’s hard to accept, but- eternity would give me time to, I guess. Time without him freaking out every time I have a birthday or look a little older.”

Grandpa chuckles quietly at that. “It’s a little nerve wracking for him, yes... he just doesn’t want to lose you. Wilbur struggles with... temporary things.”

“I *know* that- look, Grandpa, I just- this is a lot. Eternity and- Dad using his powers- and the whole- thing-” he waves a hand at the dozing teenager. “I- I’m going to talk to Tommy when he wakes up. I want his side of-”

The man himself makes a confused, tired noise before lifting his head, looking at them blearily. “What...? What-” Tommy lets out a sharp gasp and sits up, his eyes wide for a moment before he narrows them in a glare at Grandpa. “What the fu- Why did- he fucking- I didn’t do anything!”

“Tommy?” Grandpa asks, clearly caught off guard.

“I didn’t do *anything* , he- he wasn’t saying anything! Someone had to tell Fundy, he was *asking*- and the Siren fucking wasn’t, so I told him- the whole point was to tell him, right? Why did Siren even take me if I wasn’t supposed to fucking-” he gasps again, out of air. “I fucking, I didn’t *do* anything wrong, I had to tell- I-” Tommy gasps again, starting to hyperventilate, and Grandpa reaches out for him.

Before his hand can reach him, the door to the room bursts open. “Tommy!” Dad calls. Fundy didn’t even hear him approach, was he just... *listening* to them from outside the door?

“Tommy, sunfl-”

“*No!*” Tommy screams, reaching up and slamming his hands over his ears, hard enough it must hurt. “Don’t, don’t, I didn’t *do* anything, I’m sorry, I’m *sorry* please don’t do that don’t do it ever- ever again I’m so *sorry*- ”

His dad is still near the door, staring at Tommy in shock. “Wh- Tommy-” As soon as he speaks Tommy curls up, pressing harder on his ears.

“Wil, mate, stop talking, it’s scaring him-”

His dad shuts up, and Grandpa tries to pull Tommy closer, already cooing and chirping, but he just-

Tommy bursts into tears and tries to pull away as hard as he can. The second he breaks free from Grandpa’s hand, he falls out of the nest- luckily, it’s too soft in here for him to hurt himself- and bolts for the door, just barely avoiding bowling Dad over.

Dad is frozen in place, staring at where Tommy just ran, and Grandpa flies to his feet and chases after him, letting out distressed chirps in the process. In the distance, there’s a concerned grunt from Techno before heavier footsteps join the chase.

“I... don’t think I’m going to talk to Tommy,” Fundy says as he picks up an abandoned white rose.

Chapter End Notes

damn cant believe phil is a wilbur apologist :pensive:

sorry for the slight delay on this chapter, i had to rewrite the whole thing bc writing the first version felt like walking through mud. hopefully this is better! and also sadder.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

warning: minor self harm (not intentional, quickly healed)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sometimes, Phil almost wishes he had Wilbur's power. Wilbur is so forceful with it- yes, he's been known to be gentle, but he's so bad under pressure, any additional weight primed to make him explode. It exacerbates situations like today's, and normally Phil can brush over whatever problems Wilbur makes just *fine*, but-

But trauma is not easy. At least, when Phil doesn't know what's behind it. He knew what was wrong with Fundy as soon as they met him- traumatized by the loss of his mother, hurting from surviving alone after losing her. Phil just had to give him comfort, support, a family to fill the gap. Tubbo was recovering from being in the foster system, from being powerless against his father and the many foster families that controlled his life- Phil gave him things he could control, decisions he could make without repercussions. Ranboo... he was the easiest. With his memory loss, he just needed a book to write in and someone who wouldn't get frustrated with him when he repeated questions he couldn't remember asking.

Tommy? He demands attention, but balks when it's given to him. He's been treated cruelly, but rejects kindness and affection. Maybe he's overwhelmed, maybe it's too much, but how does Phil *fix it* when all he wants is to stow Tommy away in the nest and hold him until he's forgotten anything that Dream ever did to him?

And how does he fix it when Tommy's screaming at him like this?

"Stay back!" Tears are streaming down his face as he grabs a flower crown of Wither Roses out of his bag and slams it down onto his head. Phil winces- the *thorns*, they clearly stab him, but his eyes glow through his tears and all that's left is a small trail of blood dripping down his forehead.

"Tommy, *Tommy*- " Phil reaches out- it's a horrible idea, as easily as he can bestow Withering on others it could still hurt him just as badly- but Techno grabs his arm before he can touch Tommy, dragging him away. "Techno!"

"Give him space," he growls, forcing Phil back, keeping him *away* from his *fledgling* . "Why are you even *chasin'* him?"

"He's- upset about Wil-"

"Of *course* he's upset about Wilbur," Techno hisses. "He screwed up, we all know it. Grabbin' at him isn't gonna make him *less* upset."

Phil just lets out a shrill cry, needing to soothe his fledgling, and Techno tenses before pulling *further away*- no, no, he needs to get to Tommy, needs to-

“Wilbur needs you,” Techno says as he wraps his arms around Phil, keeping his wings trapped. “He’s gotta be *so sad* about Tommy. Your baby is definitely the worst off right now and you gotta go take care of him.”

Despite the flat and unfeeling voice Techno says it in, the words get to him, and he fights less. His baby *does* need him, between Fundy and Tommy he must be so torn up, Phil will need to comfort him- he wants to comfort them *both*, settle them both in the nest and oversee their little fight so they both come out happy, but as Techno pulls him out the door he can see Tommy sigh, the tears slowing- so maybe it’s okay. Maybe Tommy can wait a little.

But his baby can’t. He never can.

Wilbur is in the nest, almost yanking his hair out from how hard he’s tugging on it. “-didn’t know he would- I didn’t mean to do it in the first place, I’m so *sorry* Fundy-”

“I know, Dad,” Fundy awkwardly tries to soothe him, but the moment Techno releases Phil he falls into the nest, dragging his baby into his arms. He can do this. He can make everything better.

Wilbur immediately twists around to hug him back. “Phil- *Dad*- I didn’t mean to-”

Phil coos, hoping Wilbur can feel the love and forgiveness he has for him, that he’s always had and always will have. Even when his son screws up, even when he hurts the people dear to him, Phil will always be at his side. Always there to clean up his messes.

He’s sure it reaches him at least somewhat, because Wilbur sighs in relief and holds him tighter. “I just needed *calm* , Tommy was so *anxious* and Fundy was *scared*- ”

Techno murmurs something to Fundy, and Fundy gets up and leaves the nest with him. Phil would protest, would drag them both back in and keep them here- but he can trust Techno with Fundy, and maybe they can check on Tommy too. Techno knows that Phil wouldn’t want his fledgling alone, he *must* be going to check on him. “Tommy was anxious?” Phil asks when they’re gone.

“It’s *all* he was feeling, something about- about Fundy asking what happened to Dream made him so wary- I don’t know *why*. ” The more he talks, the more his grip on his powers slips again- Phil can feel Wilbur’s confusion and concern. It’s always so hard for him when he doesn’t understand *why* someone feels the way that they do.

“It’s okay,” Phil hums. “It’ll be okay. It just seems like what Dream did to him runs even deeper than we thought, hm? But we’ll help him-”

“He’ll be *so sweet* ,” Wilbur says, near tears. “I already know, he hasn’t really been *happy* since he’s been here but when he’s laughing his feelings are so *bright*. And even when he was calm, he healed me without even asking, he just wanted to *help* even if he couldn’t really tell something was wrong-”

Phil pulls back sharply, looking his baby over. “He had to heal you? What was wrong? What-?”

“My throat was sore from talking, it’s okay,” Wilbur immediately says. Phil frowns, but accepts it when Wilbur drags him closer again, wanting the hug back. “He’s going to be so sweet. He’s- we have to keep him, Phil.”

“We have to,” Phil agrees immediately. “He’s just a fledgling and he’s been so hurt, we have to-”

“No,” Wilbur cuts him off. “We have to *keep* him, Phil. Forever.”

That... makes him pause. “...mate,” he says delicately. “I know you’ve wanted us to have a healer ever since... you accepted eternity, but-”

“I want us to be *safe*. We’d never have to worry if we had him- and you like him! He’s your *fledgling*, Phil, and he needs you, he needs us to help, to fix him! And then he’ll fix us, too, whenever we get hurt, no one will ever be sick or hurt ever again-” More feelings slip through, longing and desperation, and Phil tightens his grip on Wilbur, almost enough to hurt.

“Mate,” he wheezes, the feelings all too much, and they quickly start to fade. “I... I know. I know, you want a healer for eternity. I get it. But let’s not rush him, alright? He’s already so overwhelmed, tying him to us forever would be a bit much.”

“I want *Tommy*. Not just a healer, *Tommy*. He’s so much, he *feels* so much. I want to fix him, I want to *erase* all that fear-” Wilbur warbles, overwhelmed by the thought. “You like him, I like him, Techno likes him-” Phil lets out a quiet laugh at that. At least he isn’t the only one who suspects it. “-he’ll fit right in. He’ll be *flock*.”

And despite himself, Phil thinks- oh, isn’t that such a nice thought? His fledgling staying, years and decades and centuries for them to unravel the pain he’s gone through, to ease him into their flock, their family. He can already picture it, that sweetness that Wilbur claims is there coming to the surface, and Tommy slotting into their nest, not reluctantly but *happy* to do so, happy to let Phil or Wilbur or Techno or even Fundy hold him close. They would never let him be hurt.

How well would Tommy really fit in? He listened so well when Techno taught him to use a knife, and Techno loves showing off his knowledge. He admires Wilbur’s music- Phil caught him listening outside Wilbur’s bedroom while Wilbur played *Your Sister Was Right* far louder than he usually would, and though Tommy was embarrassed, when he’s moved past that Wilbur will soak up that admiration like a sponge.

And Phil, he loves to dote on his children. Techno always insists he’s outgrown it, only tolerating long sessions in the nest when he knows Phil’s instincts are demanding it. Wilbur may actively seek it out, but never for long, always needing things to do to keep his mind quiet. Tommy... he’s someone who needs love and affection. Who knows how long he’s been without it at the Hero’s Organization- if he even had it before then. When everything has calmed down, Phil will give that to him. Maybe Tommy will adore it as much as Phil does, let Phil preen his hair for hours at a time, preen Phil’s wings in return. He can already

imagine Tommy's healing hands nudging feathers back into place, carefully pulling out damaged ones, helping in ways beyond using his powers.

A new son, he considers. Techno and Wilbur had both been surprises, in different ways- he never expected to be adopted by a piglin shote, nor did he or Kristin plan for an heir to their kingdom. *Deciding* that Tommy would be his is new, but it feels right. Now that Wilbur has placed the thought in his head, he *wants* it, and Phil has never wanted something without taking it.

Oh, *family*. Phil loves it so.

Chapter End Notes

phil, doing his best to fight his instincts: we'll leave tommy alone for a bit
wilbur: but have you considered.... new son?

sorry for the shorter chapter, but uh.... the next one may or may not be way longer?
depending on what i do with it, it might be RIDICULOUSLY long? or i might end up
breaking it up and having two techno POV chapters in a row. we'll see when it's done.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

warning: mentions of torture

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy is spiraling, and Techno isn't doing anything about it.

He's not sure what he can do, really. Tommy has been following him around for days now, ever since Techno pulled Phil away from him and gave him some space. He and Fundy had some quiet time in the kitchen- far away enough to not listen in if Tommy was crying, close enough that he knew they were there- and eventually he had joined them.

Still wearing the Wither crown.

It suits him, oddly enough, the dark flowers standing out against his golden hair. However, looking good aesthetically doesn't make the crown any less dangerous, and Tommy follows him closely enough that he's bumped into Techno *twice*. Even if Tommy immediately rips off his gloves and heals him, it doesn't make the few seconds of Withering any less painful.

"Do you really need that thing?" he asks on the dawn of the third day, Tommy healing him after he got underfoot while Techno made breakfast. "Phil hasn't touched you in days. Wilbur isn't speakin'. They're givin' you the space you need, so all *that's* doin' is hurtin' *me*."

"Sorry," Tommy grumbles, but he doesn't take the crown off.

He also doesn't eat breakfast. He hasn't eaten in days.

He's been dropping sunflowers and poppies into the trash by the fistful. At first, Techno thought Tommy was getting hurt to create the poppies, before he realized that Tommy hasn't *slept* in days, either, the bags under his eyes getting darker before disappearing even though he hasn't left Techno's side.

It makes him wonder. If Tommy just healed himself constantly, would he be functionally immortal, the same as them? Not aging, able to go who knows how long without food or sleep... It's interesting.

But it's not healthy, and it's freaking out Phil. The house's vibe is off.

Wilbur hasn't spoken a word since Tommy's freakout. Phil is just pacing around, dragging Wilbur or Fundy back to the nest whenever he finds them alone. Fundy is flipping between grieving his ex and trying to comfort Wilbur. And Techno has to babysit the cause of all their problems.

But it ends now. “I’m goin’ out today,” he tells Tommy while he eats breakfast, Tommy not touching his own portion.

Tommy’s eyes shoot up to look at him. “What? Where?”

“Ace is back from vacation, and he needs somethin’ from me. I can’t exactly bring you along-”

“I’m coming,” Tommy says, almost a snarl. “I’m *not* staying here.”

Techno sighs. He was hoping telling him early would give Tommy time to prepare himself, but now he’s wishing he put it off to the last minute. “Theseus. We agreed durin’ that talk about your employment that you wouldn’t be goin’ out-”

“Yeah, well, shit’s changed.”

It sure has. “No one’s gonna bother you just because I’m not here. I haven’t had to stop anyone from-”

“ *Because* you’ve been here! You being *around* made them leave me alone!” Tommy reaches out, about to grab Techno by the sleeve, before stopping himself. He finally remembered the flower crown before touching him. “If you’re gone then there’s nothing *stopping* them from fucking- doing whatever-”

He sighs again. “They won’t do anything.”

“Yeah, because I’m going with you, *Blade* .”

He feels oddly discomfited in how Tommy says his name. At first it was good that Tommy didn’t use his real one, sticking to his supervillain alias, but now it’s just... strange. Phil has always been ‘Phil’, Tommy’s been switching between calling Wilbur by name or ‘the Siren’ since his freak out, but Techno is still just the Blade. Even now that he seems to be Tommy’s favorite.

“No, you’re not coming with me.” Techno says it with finality, not going to argue any further. Tommy growls, but lets it drop for now.

And then he disappears. He leaves Techno alone for over an hour, the longest they’ve been separated in days. It’s even more uncomfortable after he’s grown so used to him- Techno keeps craning his neck to make sure he’s not about to bump into Tommy and get Withered, but he’s just no longer there.

Then Tommy is back, with no explanation and in too bad of a mood for Techno to ask for one. It only gets worse when Techno gets ready to actually go out, but he isn’t caving. He doesn’t need a healer to help Ace, and he definitely doesn’t need a *distraction*.

“It shouldn’t be more than a few hours. If you get uncomfortable, just...” Techno frowns as he puts on his mask. “You can hide in my room. Don’t touch any of the weapons. Or books. Try not to touch anythin’, actually.”

“Whatever. Fuck off.”

That’s the best send off he’s going to get, probably, and Tommy retreats further into the house as Techno leaves, driving himself to Las Nevadas.

He hates it here. Not only does it overwhelm all his senses- the lights, the food, the music and machines blaring- but there’s so much *gold*. Horribly *misused* gold. If it weren’t for Wilbur wanting to stay on friendly terms, he’d burn the whole city down and take the gold with him.

But Wilbur likes Ace, for whatever reason, so he lets it go. For now. In a few decades, when Ace has passed, he’s taking this place for all it’s worth.

Techno makes his way to Ace’s office. He gets no trouble, of course- people know better than to stop the Blade when he’s on a mission. He lets himself in-

And pauses in the doorway. Quackity looks *exhausted*. Not just like he’s been working hard, but like he’s been drained of all energy, and at any moment he’ll collapse. Techno may hate his nation, but he doesn’t hate him. “...I’m guessin’ the vacation didn’t do you much good.”

“It didn’t,” Quackity tries to laugh, but it trails off almost immediately. “Look, I... I can’t help on this one.”

“Yeah, no, I guessed. You look like you’re going to pass out.”

“No, it’s not-” He rubs his face tiredly. “I promised someone I wouldn’t get involved with this guy. But we need information... and honestly, I’m guessing you do, too.”

Techno narrows his eyes at him. “What is that supposed to mean?”

“It’s... the person I need help with? It’s 404.”

“...you’re tellin’ me you’ve got 404 locked up in one of your rooms.” This isn’t just an interrogation. This is a *gift* to Techno. Someone who would know about *Tommy*, about what Dream could have done to him- someone who can fill those annoying gaps in Techno’s knowledge- is perfect. He lets himself grin, and Quackity laughs nervously.

“Yeah, yeah, I thought you’d like that. But I, uh- I can’t interrogate him myself. Really, I shouldn’t be doing it at all, but- I need to know how the *fuck* Dream got his hands on Schlatt’s stuff.”

That makes Techno lose his grin. “Schlatt’s stuff.”

Schlatt is a top tier villain. Or he was, before he was arrested. He got caught because he had a heart attack, of all things, and was barely resuscitated before getting tossed in the Vault. Quackity used that as an opportunity to file for divorce- there was enough evidence of abuse that he was declared not guilty of being complicit in Schlatt’s crimes- and while Schlatt’s empire crumbled, Quackity built his own. A new city, unbound by the Essempi’s laws, where hedonism reigned.

But Quackity has been hunting down Schlatt's missing things- a lot of items of power that disappeared during Schlatt's arrest. Techno didn't know what went missing, but he knows Quackity has been tearing apart L'manberg in search of them.

Quackity eyes him carefully. "...Tommy didn't tell you, huh?"

"Didn't tell me *what*."

He puts his hands up non-threateningly. "Relax, relax. When he showed up, he paid me to give him your address. It wasn't just that he was a healer- though I would have set up a meeting for you guys, don't worry- it was because he handed me one of Schlatt's things. He said Dream had his fucking-" Quackity cuts himself off, and takes a deep breath. "Dream had it. Tommy took it, and traded it for your address. Plus a couple hot meals and a place to stay until he could make his way to you."

Techno walks towards Quackity's table in long strides, *gently* resting his hand on the desk- if he wasn't being careful, he thinks he would break it right now. "How much do you know about Dream and Tommy?" It's more of a demand than a question.

Quackity grimaces. "I know the kid was a mess when he showed up. Hadn't eaten in who knows how long, puked up everything we gave him at first because his stomach couldn't handle it. He made a... I'm guessing *not* a joke about how Dream broke his arm for touching it before he stole it. But..." Techno's glare convinces him to keep talking. "I also know Dream's *personal* healer disappeared about a month before Tommy showed up in Las Nevadas. I don't know much beyond that."

Techno didn't even know he had a personal healer. That's... weird, isn't it? Healers are so rare, he can't imagine they have enough healers for every hero to have one of their own. Hell, having Tommy just for their family strikes him as greedy- though Techno doesn't care. He's a greedy person.

In the old days, a good healer would sustain a whole village. Tommy's far beyond a 'good' healer. The thought of *Dream* keeping him all to himself makes Techno add another tick to the 'times Dream will die if we ever resurrect him' tally.

"Alright. You need to know about Schlatt's stuff."

"That's right," Quackity says. "Just, uh... do me one favor?"

This already is a favor- but Techno is getting so much out of it, he won't begrudge him this. "Shoot."

"Don't kill him. The person I promised- they're, uh, a big 404 fan."

"Cringe."

That gets a small laugh out of Quackity. "Yeah. But yeah, no, don't kill him. Whatever else is fine, he'll get patched up."

Techno nods his head, and lets Charlie- Tommy is right, definitely a slime, but Techno doesn't bring it up or he'll get a lecture about Charlie's many, many bones- lead him to where they've kept 404.

He steps inside the interrogation room. 404 looks bored, as usual, despite how he's been tied up with a power suppressing collar on his throat. "Ugh," he groans when he realizes who's come in. "Not *you*."

Techno is sort of offended. 404 doesn't even sound *scared* that it's the Blade coming to torture him for information- instead he just sounds bothered, like Techno is his least favorite barista at a coffee shop or something. "Sorry to disappoint. Gogy."

404 raises his eyebrows, the only visible sign of his alarm with those dumb goggles covering his eyes. "How did you...?"

"We can talk about *that* later. For now," he pulls a knife from his boot. "Let's discuss Clay Taken."

404 scoffs. "What's there to tell? *Your* group killed him already. Remember?" Techno can just barely make out the anger simmering under his nonchalant attitude. He wishes Ace could get over whatever Wilbur did so he could have brought him along. He'll just have to stick to old fashioned torture.

"Him bein' dead doesn't change what we need to know. We want to know where JSchlatt's things are. And *I*-" Techno steps closer, his grip tightening on the knife. "-want to know about what he did to *Theseus*."

"...who?"

Techno blinks behind his mask. "Uh. Tommy?" That doesn't get any recognition either. "...Theo?"

404 pauses, and then snorts. "Oh, that is- oh gods. You have *Theo*? I am *so* sorry."

"...heh?"

"Oh, I guess you having a healer is a good thing for you and all, but- *Theo*. You cannot tell me he isn't driving you insane. He's a nuisance. I mean, I don't know why Dream went so crazy trying to get him back after he ran away."

Techno hums neutrally, stifling the urge to cut 404's tongue out of his mouth. That would not be helpful for interrogation, he reminds himself. It would be pretty incompatible with the entire concept of interrogation, actually. He'll have to save it for after, then. "Then you don't mind talkin' about him."

"Why do you want to know?" 404 shoots back. "I'm sure you have your own way of keeping healers in line. Dream's was... kind of bad, I guess, and it only kind of worked, since he still doesn't *shut up* unless I put him to sleep, but-"

He tilts his head, interested in that line of discussion. "You used your powers on him."

404 sighs tiredly, leaning back in his chair despite how it must twist the arms tied behind him. “Dream left me to *babysit* him during his patrols. Pandas did it for years, but then he got all weird about it and Dream made *me* take over. It was the only way to get through it without going crazy. Besides, he heals just as well when he’s half asleep, so I don’t know why he was ever awake.”

Years. Years? “How long did you have Theseus-?”

Suddenly, there’s a loud bang on the door. There’s some unfortunately familiar swearing before it opens, Tommy limping in slightly as his eyes glow and a cornflower grows in his palm. “Did I hear my name, bitches?” His eyes fall on 404, and his eyes go wide.

404 just groans louder. “Okay, fine, I’ll tell you whatever you want, get *him* out of here.”

Tommy frowns, poorly hiding hurt. “Wow, okay, dickhead. Fuck you.”

“...Theseus. What are you doin’ here- no, actually, how did you *get* here?” He has the car. Phil can fly fast, but not while carrying someone, and there’s no way Tommy would let himself be carried- and that’s *ignoring* that he’s still wearing that goddamn crown.

“I had Charlie drive me.”

“...Charlie... is here,” Techno says slowly.

Tommy looks at him like he’s stupid. “He’s slime, big man. He can be in multiple places at once.”

“And how did you... get him to drive you.”

That gets Tommy to grin sharply. “I told you I wasn’t staying back. I stole the Siren’s phone to call Ace earlier. Charlie got me a few minutes after you left.”

Techno sighs. Tommy absolutely *played* him, acting up how upset he was so Techno wouldn’t look too closely. And Quackity should have *told* him that instead of letting it be the world’s worst surprise. “You’re not stayin’ in here.”

“Watch me,” Tommy says, dragging a chair out from the interrogation table, dropping into it when he’s a little further away from 404.

Techno ignores that, grabbing the back of Tommy’s shirt and pulling him back up to his feet, ignoring his yelp. “I said, you’re not stayin’ in here.” Tommy is a *healer*. He winced and looked away watching the quick decapitation of his ‘former jailer’, he’s not going to be able to handle witnessing a full interrogation.

“Yes I am! Ace said I can!”

“No, he didn’t.” Does Tommy even know what’s happening here?

Tommy tries to pull himself free of Techno’s grasp. “Yeah, he did! He said I can heal 404 when you interrogate him, that you can be more fucked up about it or whatever!”

...Ace said 'he'll get patched up'. Techno assumed *normal* patching up, did he mean-? He and Ace are going to have *words* after this. And maybe knives as well. "You are not doing that. You're gonna go wait in another room."

"No I'm not!" He swipes at Techno, who drops him, careful to avoid skin to skin contact. He is *not* about to get Withered in front of his own future victim. "I'm going to help, dickhead!"

"Theseus, you're a *healer*. You're not helpin' me *torture* someone."

Tommy growls at him, like a wild animal. "Are you fucking *kidding* me? I'm the *Syndicate's* healer, I can do whatever the fuck I want!" 404 lets out a surprised sound, and Tommy whirls around to face him. "And he- George fucking *helped* Dream! George just fucking *knocked me out* whenever he wasn't around- I've slept half my fucking life away because he didn't want to put up with me!"

Techno steps closer. "Calm down, he's gonna pay for that, but you don't have to be-"

Tommy just moves around the table, putting it between them even though it puts him closer to 404. "And he was a fucking *dick* about it, laughing whenever- whenever Dream treated me like shit- he- he watched Dream break my *arm* once and just looked the other way like it didn't- didn't *matter*-"

"Theo," 404 says, finally showing some actual nerves for the first time. "That was- you went through Dream's book, you knew you weren't allowed to-"

Tommy ignores him, raising his voice to talk over him. "You don't get to tell me that I'm going to sit out of this. You don't get to say I can't help because I'm a *healer*." He raises his hands, grabbing his Wither crown and pulling it off himself "Yeah, I'm a healer," Tommy snarls. "But that means people have to get *hurt*."

He slams the crown onto 404's head.

Chapter End Notes

TITLE DROP. THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THE WHOLE GODDAMN TIME

all that talk about how healers are so NICE and can't STAND to watch people get hurt and tommy is just like yes i will torture a man just to avoid sitting at home with a bunch of freaks

i hope you enjoyed this chapter, because i had a lot of fun writing it! warning: next chapter may take a while, but it WILL be violent. im putting this here now so that if people don't want to read abt torture, they'll have multiple warnings to stop them

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

WARNING: this chapter contains george being tortured. you can skip to "Tommy follows him out the door." summary will be in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

404 gasps and screeches in pain as the Withering kicks in, the most emotion Techno has ever heard from him. Tommy just glares down at him, not a hint of regret or empathy in his eyes.

It sounds like he never got that from 404, either, so Techno can't begrudge him that.

But he's *fucking* thrown. Tommy, their healer, is- torturing someone. Right in front of him. With *Withering*, one of the worst pains in existence.

Oh, god. Tommy is going to fit into the Syndicate *too well*.

"Take that off him," Techno says, and when Tommy looks up at him, betrayed, he continues. "Wither Roses only aren't fatal because people physically can't hold onto them long enough to die from it. Leavin' it on him will kill him, and we need information."

"...oh." Tommy picks it up, returning it to his own head. 404 is still writhing, tugging at the restraints as the Withering slowly fades. He falls limp when it's over, gasping for air.

"Good," Techno murmurs, and Tommy turns his head to the side, not fast enough for Techno to miss the way he smiles at the praise. "Now. 404-"

"His full name is George Lore," Tommy tells him, leaning on the back of 404's chair. 404 leans away from him desperately, almost falling off the chair in the process.

Techno hums. That could be useful if they ever ran into him again after this- he promised Ace he wouldn't kill him in the interrogation, but no promises for later. 404 will suffer for his bystander apathy. "Thank you, Theseus. George Lore. What do you know about Dream stealing JSchlatt's belongings?"

He's still catching his breath, so Techno gives him a few moments before he gestures for Tommy to bring the crown down again. As soon as he realizes, 404 twists around to try to avoid it touching him. "Wai- wait, I think- I don't know, he just showed up at home with a ton of shit one day-"

Tommy huffs and twirls the flower crown in his hands. "Your house, right?"

“Yeah,” 404 confirms with a fast nod. “He wanted to store it with some of his other stuff. The only thing he took with him to Headquarters was that book.”

“The book,” Techno says. “The same one that mentioned resurrection?”

Surprisingly, that makes *both* of them tense up. Tommy he understands- he maybe shouldn’t have brought it up so flippantly when Dream threatened to kill him and bring him back with it- but 404?

“...yeah,” 404 says weakly. “That’s the one.”

“He loved that stupid book,” Tommy says, crossing his arms over the back of the chair. “He read it all the time. I didn’t think he could *use* it, though.”

“Eh,” Techno shrugs. “Old Magic is weird about who’s capable of it.” Despite his casual response to Tommy, he keeps watching 404. He looks pale as they keep talking, and Techno reaches out, removing his goggles. There’s some drying blood on them, and removing them reveals trails of blood dripping from his head- probably from the Roses’ thorns. “What was in the book, George?”

“Just... just revival. Different... kinds. Binding ghosts, or... bringing back people.” 404 looks nauseous talking about it.

“...who did he bring back?” Techno asks. 404 doesn’t answer, and after a long pause, Tommy doesn’t wait for Techno’s cue, dropping the crown back onto his head.

404 screams again, shaking his head desperately- the flower crown flies off his head and, out of pure instinct, Techno grabs it. He drops it instantly, of course, but the damage is done, and he tenses to avoid giving 404 a similar reaction as his hand burns furiously, the sensation crawling up his arm as his nerves scream in pain.

Tommy rushes to his side, resting a hand over his, a new Wither Rose sprouting as the pain quickly disappears. “Fuck, sorry, I didn’t think- I’ll put it on him harder next time so it can’t come off like that-”

“It’s fine,” Techno reassures him. “Stuff like this is a learnin’ process. You shoulda seen my first few interrogations on my own- I ended up killin’ a lot of them out of embarrassment.”

That gets a small laugh out of Tommy. “God, I can’t believe the Blade is a huge dork that sucks at torture.”

“Hey, it was millennia ago. Give me a break.”

“I don’t think I will, Blade.”

“Theo, what the *hell* is wrong with you?” 404 gasps out, interrupting their nice moment. Tommy tenses his shoulders before turning to look at their victim. 404 has finally fallen out of his chair, curled up on the ground partially under the table. There’s more blood dripping from his head, as well as pieces of blackened skin laying around him.

“Fuck do you mean, ‘what’s wrong with me’?” Tommy snaps at him.

“You- you’re a *healer*! You’re not supposed to be-” 404 looks him over. “-like *this*, you’re like- a sociopath or something-”

“Yeah, and heroes aren’t supposed to beat the shit out of their healers, but uhhh, hey, look at my fucking *childhood*- ”

“Theseus.” Tommy’s angry look fades as he looks over at Techno. “Try not to let him rile you up. You have the power in this situation, lettin’ him get to you is givin’ up some of that power.” Tommy frowns, but gives a little nod, and scoops up the Wither crown from the ground. “Let’s give that a rest, I still haven’t learned anythin’ Ace is gonna want.” Techno steps over to 404, carefully not-careful as he steps on 404’s leg.

404 yelps when he puts his weight on it, not quite hard enough to break the bone yet, but enough to hurt. He yanks on his leg, trying to free it, but Techno doesn’t let him, stepping harder.

“George Lore,” he growls. “Who did Dream bring back from the dead?”

“M-me, obviously!” It’s clearly the truth, but it’s not enough information, and he doesn’t lighten his weight, letting 404’s leg bend awkwardly underneath him. “I- Warden stabbed me, a few- a few weeks ago, Dream- I bled out, and he- he brought me back-”

“What was it like?” Tommy asks, his voice oddly... innocent. A little weak, worried- Dream had described it as a personal hell, something Tommy could have dealt with- something he may deal with, one day.

“It-” 404 takes a quick breath. “It was bad. Alone, felt like I was dying over and over again so I had to fight to get away from the pain, but it was *endless* - I couldn’t even just let it take me because giving up made the pain worse- and it was-” He swallows. “It was Dream’s *fault*.”

Techno snorts. “What, you had a imaginary Dream torturing you?”

404 squirms, trying to get out from under Techno, and he lets him, a small gesture to make him more talkative. “No. No, I mean- someone- I was told that if he didn’t resurrect me, I would have- I would have actually moved on. To a better afterlife. But because Dream... because Dream brought me back, I went through *hell* for- for I don’t know how long. Days.” He tries to pull himself to sit up, but Techno kicks him back down- he’s not being *that* kind.

“What else did Dream leave with you?”

“Uh, I don’t know-” Techno holds his knife a little more aggressively, reminding 404 of its existence. “-uh, no more books- a bottle collection, some weird ender eye necklace, and he gave me some jewelry.”

“Jewelry?”

“Not magic or anything, I mean- some valuable stuff JSchlatt had, I think. Um, gold armbands, necklaces, a bunch of useless pretty shit.”

“Just like you,” Tommy snorts, and 404 groans.

“This is why no one *likes* you, Theo-”

Techno flips the knife in his hand, bringing it down in one smooth motion and plunging it deep into 404’s shoulder. Before he can even scream, he twists it, severing more nerves and rending that arm unusable- unless Tommy chooses to fix it. Which Tommy doesn’t have to do. It’s entirely his choice.

When the screaming trails off, taken over by pained sobs, Techno speaks up. “You don’t speak for everyone, 404.”

He doesn’t respond, still gasping to breathe through the pain, but Tommy looks surprised, then pleased, though he tries to hide it. Just an employee, Techno reminds himself idly. One who’s eager to learn and responds well to positive feedback. *Just* an employee.

“We’ll need an address to pick up those things, Lore,” Techno tells him.

404 shudders, then yelps at how the movement twists his shoulder. “I’m- not telling you where I- live-”

“If you tell us, you can always move,” Techno points out the obvious. “But if you *don’t* tell us, you’ll die, and we’ll find it anyway because we have your name. Sounds like a pretty obvious choice to me.” When 404 continues to hesitate, he continues. “You know, you might bleed out either way from this,” he says, tapping his shoulder and ignoring how 404 screeches at it. “But the sooner you say, the sooner you can get out of here.”

“The- it’s- 44 Amanita Street, in- in the Greater Essempi.”

“Are-?” Tommy stops himself for a moment, but continues anyway. “Are my discs there, too?”

The *vinyls*. How had he forgotten that Tommy said 404 could have them? He wants those far more than he wants any of JSchlatt’s things, if this could kill two birds with one stone-

But 404 is shaking his head as much as he can without exacerbating his injury. “No, it’s- Pandas had them.”

Another hero to hunt down, but Techno may as well finish off the trio, then. Maybe it could be Tommy’s next lesson- from the way he looks angry at this information, he assumes Pandas was equally terrible to him. “We’ll get them,” he tells Tommy, who just crosses his arms with a huff.

“Can- is that all?” 404 asks, almost hopeful.

“Ehhhh...” Techno drags it out. “This time.”

“Then- Theo, my shoulder-“

“Hold it,” Techno says sharply, though Tommy’s already reaching out to 404. “Theseus. You don’t have to heal him if you don’t want. Ace can get someone to give him normal stitches.” He wouldn’t be able to use that arm without a lot of physical therapy, if ever, but he wouldn’t die. Probably.

Tommy pauses, looking between them. 404 has the sense to not demand help, though he clearly wants to, and Tommy huffs before kneeling down and resting a hand on his arm. “Only because I wanna know how hard it is to fix,” he mutters. It takes a minute, but 404’s shoulder sews itself back together.

Techno nods in approval when it’s done. “Leave him here. We have to go let Ace know.”

Tommy follows him out the door. As soon as they’ve left 404 behind, he’s *grinning*, happy in a way that Techno feels he hasn’t seen yet. “That- that was *good*, big man.”

“Yeah?” He didn’t expect... any of that from their healer, but it’s... good. Their healer can be just as cruel as them. “You did well.”

“I know,” Tommy says smugly.

“...don’t tell Phil I let you do that.”

“Bribe me.”

Techno sighs. “Uh... there’s a water ice place nearby.”

“What? Why *water ice*? ”

“Because you haven’t eaten in days and I’m not gettin’ you ice cream so you can throw up in the car.” Tommy grumbles, but seems to accept the deal, and Techno leads the way as soon as he’s debriefed Ace- and promised to speak to him later about secretly inviting a *child* to join in on an interrogation.

It’s probably a ridiculous sight, the Blade buying water ice for himself and a random child, but the cashier cleverly treats them normally other than giving them more than they paid for. Tommy snatches it out of Techno’s hands. “Thanks, Blade.”

“You, uh.” He starts leading the way back to the car. “You can call me by my name, by the way. I mean, not right now, in public, but in general.”

Tommy eyes his warily. “...why?”

“It’s gonna get annoyin’ to hear my alias even when I’m just relaxin’ at home. Plus, I don’t like bein’ the odd one out, and you’ve been callin’ everyone else by their names, so...”

“...yeah. Sure-“ Tommy suddenly chokes, almost dropping his water ice, but Techno shoots a hand out to catch it. “Fuck- *brain freeze*, ” he hisses in pain.

“...can’t heal that, huh?”

Tommy tears up. “What’s the fucking point of having healing powers if I can’t heal *this?* ”

“Just stick your tongue to the roof of your mouth,” Techno tells him calmly. “It’ll stop sooner.” Tommy can be so overdramatic, just like a little brother.

Wait- no. He meant just like *his* little brother- like Wilbur- Tommy is just an employee. Not like a brother, just someone who *works* for them, that’s all-

“Was I put on this Earth just to suffer?!” Tommy wails as he continues to be plagued by brain freeze. Techno can’t help but wonder the same thing.

Chapter End Notes

summary: George is horribly hurt by the Withering crown, and Techno is shocked that Tommy would use it, but he begins guiding Tommy through torturing George while questioning him. Dream apparently stored some of JSchlatt's missing belongings in George's house, including the revival book. Dream has used the book to bring George back from the dead. Techno told Tommy that he didn't have to heal George, but he did anyway, and they leave to get water ice.

my bedrock bros agenda is showing. you know when i got into dsmp i was absolutely a crime boys main? and now all i write is techno getting overly attached to his little brother.

also i keep saying 'the next update will take so long!' and then fuckin blast it out. never trust me. i can't even trust me.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur is pacing around his room yet again.

He doesn't want to be- he wants to be out of his room, with his family. He wants to chat with Fundy about his finals, or talk to Phil and Techno about work- but he can't say a word outside this room. He can barely speak *in* this room.

Tommy is so scared of him. Wilbur hasn't spoken to him since his disastrous attempt in the nest, but the way Tommy ducks out of any room Wilbur enters unless he can *hide* behind Techno, the way he clings to his crown of Roses as if he'll throw it like a frisbee if Wilbur steps closer... it's pretty obvious.

Phil has told him things are looking up, that Tommy doesn't flinch anymore when Phil gets too close, that he's been calming down since Techno started taking him out of the house. He says maybe Tommy's just been too cooped up and he overreacted, that maybe Wilbur should just *try again*-

But he doesn't want to scare him. He doesn't want to feel that fear directed at him again. So he'll just... wait it out. He can afford to- Tommy is still so young, he has time before they would give him eternity, even if Wilbur would like him to have it sooner rather than later. It'll be okay, he just- he hates waiting. He wants to just-

He's not using his powers. He already lost his bet to Techno- sort of- but he's not going to do it. He wants Tommy to be *genuinely* happy- forcing him to feel happy whenever he's with Wilbur isn't good enough. It wouldn't feel the same.

So he's pacing. And pacing. And pacing. And-

There's a knock on his door. He almost calls for whoever it is to come in, but the words don't leave his mouth. Instead, he paces his way over to the door and opens it.

Tommy is on the other side. He almost slams it shut out of surprise.

Wilbur takes a step back, and Tommy takes a step forward, almost barging into his room. Wilbur gets entirely out of the way, not wanting Tommy to touch him when he has his Wither crown on. He lets out a confused noise- why would Tommy come here?

"We need to fucking *talk*, bitchboy." *Wary-wary-nervous* . He always acts so tough, but he's always- "And if I even think you're using your powers, I'm gonna kill you."

Wilbur nods, agreeing almost desperately. He needs this chance, this opportunity to fix everything. He's already so sick of waiting.

Tommy hesitates for a moment before speaking up. "Apologize to me."

“I’m sorry,” Wilbur says immediately. “I shouldn’t have done it, and I didn’t really *mean* to- but I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, sunflower.”

“Can you- why do you fucking *call* me that?” *Annoyance-longing*. “It’s so fucking *cutesy*, I hate it.”

“No you don’t,” he responds without thinking.

Tommy sneers at him. “Don’t tell me what I don’t *hate*- “

If he’s going to make it up to Tommy, he has to be honest with him, right? “Tommy, my powers aren’t just controlling other people’s emotions. I can also tell what people are feeling. You *don’t* hate when I call you sunflower.”

He pales, alarmingly fast. “You- you fucking *what*?”

“It’s not something I can turn off,” Wilbur lies quickly. He can, but it would drive him *insane*, so really it’s just a little white lie, it’s not a big deal- “But I always know how you feel. You’re so- you’re so scared all the time, Tommy. And it hurts me to feel it- I just- I want to make you safe. *Happy*. But I keep screwing it up, don’t I?”

“...yeah. You do,” he rasps, *confusion-longing-relief*. Wilbur... doesn’t understand that at all. “You- you get affected when I’m... freaked out or whatever?”

“I do,” he answers, though he thinks Tommy is asking something different, asking if Wilbur becomes scared when Tommy is- he can believe that for now, if it’s easier for him. If it’s *relieving*, for whatever reason. “It’s- you’ll be safe here, okay? We won’t be your next Dream. We *all* want you to be happy here. Phil and Techno, they’ve always respected healers so much, and I... I don’t want you to be scared or sad or *longing* anymore. Can you give me one last chance?”

“You’re- you’re fucking insane.” *RELIEF-longing*. “Yeah fine whatever, just- no making me feel shit. That was- that was fucked up. Why did you even-? I know you were angry I told Fundy but that was the whole *point* of us going, wasn’t it, and you weren’t answering his questions and-”

Wilbur interrupts as Tommy’s voice dips low into *fear*. “I didn’t want him being scared, either. Fundy’s- he’s delicate. No, not delicate, just- he’s gone through a lot, and he’s... I don’t want to scare him away. You, you know the type of things the Syndicate does, you’ve *seen* Techno kill, but- we’ve always kept Fundy away from it. I don’t...” He’s not using his powers deliberately, he’s not, but if a little bit of *pity* pushes through to Tommy it isn’t his fault. “I don’t want my little champion to be afraid of me again.”

Tommy crosses his arms, and for a moment he’s worried that Tommy could tell, but no, he’s just rubbing his arms awkwardly. “Why... how do you have a fox kid, anyway? I mean, you’re... you’re an avian, right?” He peers at Wilbur unsurely. Fair enough- he’s missing the obvious wings, after all.

Wilbur chuckles. “His mother was a fox too, and hybrid children tend to take after their mothers unless they’re human, so...”

Tommy squints at him more. “...nah, I’m pretty sure you’ve never gotten pussy in your life. You stole him, right?”

“Wh-” He’s taken aback, genuinely a little insulted. At least it lightened the mood. “You little- I didn’t *steal* him, he’s my biological son!”

“Sounds fake as shit. He should be a birdy fox or something. Fox with a beak. Bird with a tail. Whatever.”

“That’s not how- have you ever *met* a hybrid before us?”

Tommy huffs. “Only goats. And, uh, a netherborn, if that counts.”

“A neth- oh. Right.” Pandas, number three hero. Maybe he’s been knocked up to second place now. “Well, you can’t *combine* species like that. It’s one or the other. Having two hybrid parents can make your traits stronger, which is why he’s-”

“A total furry. And Empress Kristin was a human, right? That’s why you don’t have wings?”

Wilbur hesitates. If Tommy’s staying- which he *is*, no matter what he says, no matter what even Techno might say- he should tell him. But it was *so hard* to tell Fundy, and he’s never told anyone else, his family already there when it happened, and...

It’s Tommy, his sunflower. Maybe knowing one of Wilbur’s weaknesses will make him a little more open to him, a little more willing to hear him out. “I used to have wings.”

“...what?” *Confusion-alarm.*

“I was born with wings,” he murmurs, still able to feel a phantom twinge in his back, as if he could still just stretch them out and take flight. “Just like Phil. Techno was so annoyed when I was a kid, I swear, he’d be keeping an eye on me and next thing he knew I’d be out a window and in the sky where he couldn’t catch me. Phil used to call him his ‘flightless flock’- now it’s both of us, ha.” And soon Tommy, too.

Tommy’s eyes are wide, alarmed. “What... happened?”

“*That...* is a long and sad story, sunflower. Are you sure you want to hear it?” Tommy’s face scrunches up at the nickname, and then turns a little pink, but he nods quickly. Wilbur sighs, sitting on his bed and patting the spot next to him for Tommy to sit. He sits further away than Wilbur would like, but it’s fine.

“I was in my early twenties,” Wilbur recounts like it was yesterday. “I was the prince of the Antarctic Empire, but I didn’t have any power yet. Phil wanted me to know more about the people and their needs before letting me take charge of anything, so I started going out to learn about our people.”

“And then I was... *incredibly* distracted. I met this beautiful hybrid, you see. Their name was- well, the Empire was one of the last places in the world where people knew about Old Magic, so people could be careful about giving out their real names. I never got their name, so I just called them Friend.” Wilbur sighs, remembering lying by the river and running his hands through their hair, them preening his wings in return. “The Empire was run by hybrids, but many other places were...”

“Shit?” Tommy fills in where Wilbur can’t find the word.

It gets a sad chuckle out of him. “Worse than shit. They’d been kept as a pet in another nation. Their *owners* had carved out their tongue, then sliced off their sheep horns and tail when they tried to escape. They managed to find their way to the Empire, where they’d be-” Safe. Wouldn’t it have been so nice if they had been *safe*? “Safer. Do you know how Old Magic works, Tommy?”

He seems a little taken aback by the sudden subject change. “Uh... you need someone’s name? It, uh... needs sacrifice?”

“You only need someone’s name if you’re hurting them. To give a gift, all you need is a sacrifice.” Wilbur taps his fingers against his knee nervously. It’s *so hard* to talk about this. “I loved them. And they hated themselves after how they’d been hurt. They missed their horns more than anything. And I... no, I was still selfish and spoiled. But I loved them *so much*. I was less selfish, for them. I made a trade. My wings, for them to get their hybrid traits back.”

“...fucking *primes*, ” Tommy whispers, *longing* yet again. “I’d never fucking do that, never in my fucking *life*. ”

Wilbur shrugs. “I was young and in love. I’d have done *more*, I would have- I would have married them-” He runs a shaking hand through his hair. “They died. Just a few- a few *weeks* after- we had ambassadors from another nation enter the Empire, and- Friend never said that they used to belong to a *prince*. The prince saw them, and- I found their tortured body in the spot we’d always met in.”

Tommy gasps, just enough for Wilbur to get a taste of *horror-anger*.

“I didn’t know who it had been. I was *furious*- I kept going out to investigate, leaving my family with the ambassadors-” His breath hitches, and he has to stop himself from pushing out his heartbreak, still fresh even after centuries. It’s too much for him to hold on his own- but it’s too much for Tommy, too. “I thought Phil would handle it. He was busy, he left it to Techno. Techno was training the soldiers, he left it to- to Mom. They liked her best, since she was *human*. They told her how rough it must be, acted like she was *trapped* there by beasts- they offered her sanctuary in their little fucking nation that we could *step* on, if we wanted. They even brought up their- their former slave they *found* in our Empire. When she told them to *fuck off*, they got angry- but not as angry as when she told Phil about what fuckwit racists they were.”

Wilbur takes a few deep breaths, reigning in his anger. “There was an assassin. Sent by them, obviously, the man barely had to be tortured to admit it. We... we didn’t have a healer, and... my mother died.”

“That... that isn’t in the history books,” Tommy whispers, *pity-anger*. It’s exactly what Wilbur wants from him.

“That was the day the Empire fell,” Wilbur tells him. “The ambassadors were trying to escape. I was not going to let them do that. There was... a spell. Old Magic that hadn’t been used in at least a millennia. It killed every *single* person in the Empire, including those *rat fucks* trying to run back home.”

“That’s... a lot of dead people, king.” *Wonder-anger-pity*.

King, Tommy’s calling him *king* again- “I lost two of the most important people in my life within days. I didn’t give a shit who else died, as long as those murderers did. My- my mom was supposed to be *immortal*, like us, I was never supposed to *lose* her- but she still died.” Because they didn’t have a healer. But they do now. And they’ll never be without again. “I loved Fundy’s mother, too, but... she passed before we could reconcile after a fight. And I love Fundy, but I’m terrified something will happen to him, too. *That’s* why I panicked and used my powers in the car. I’m sorry, Tommy.”

It’s quiet for a moment before Tommy reaches over and awkwardly pats his arm. “Well, that’s why I’m here, king. None of these bitches are ever dying with me around.”

He laughs, surprised and relieved in equal measure. “I know. I *know*. It’s- I’m glad you came to us.” He’s glad that it was Tommy, someone he’ll enjoy being around for eternity. He’s glad to have a new *little brother*. “I don’t suppose you have anything incredibly traumatic you’d want to get off your chest?” Something to help Wilbur know what he’s meant to do, how he can help Tommy be *happier* ?

“Nah,” Tommy answers, far too fast, just a touch of *nervous* underneath it. “I’m good.”

“...sure,” Wilbur says, picking his battles. They’ll have all the time in the world, he can be just a *little* patient now that Tommy is talking to him again, letting *Wilbur* talk.

Tommy glances at him- no, not *at* him, past him? Or behind him?- for a moment before standing up. “Bla- Techno kicked me out of the kitchen while he was making lunch, but he’s probably done by now. Come on.”

...did he really only come talk to Wilbur because Techno was busy? Ugh. He doesn’t like *Techno* being the favorite- he’ll have to step up his game, and fast. “Alright,” he says, getting up and heading out of his room.

For some reason, he can feel Tommy’s eyes staring at his back.

Chapter End Notes

i wrote like two different starts to this chapter before i ended up changing it completely. this was a MENACE to write.

anyway, wilbur semi-forgiven-ish! AND family backstory time. all in all a fun and not at all devastating conversation for the two of them.

(sorry kristin is dead. i love her very much. i'm sure she's having a rocking time fighting her way up Death's ranks to become Death herself to have the power to communicate with her family again.)

hope you enjoyed this chapter!

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

WARNING: short bit of torture (skip from "But I don't know why you're so obsessed with this." to "...uh," Techno turns back"; short bit of body horror (skip from "Tommy is healing the man's leg" to "I fucking knew I could!")

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil's in a lovely mood as he flies into town. It's one of Techno and Tommy's days out- a sweet tradition they started a few weeks back, Techno taking him out for a few hours to get a meal or go shopping. He's hoping to catch them before they return home- he has some *great* news, and maybe an excuse to extend their day out and join them. Foolish has finally finished the expansion, which means *Tommy* gets to pick out furniture and clothes to fill the closets and anything else he could possibly want.

Tommy's been in a much better mood since he started going on trips with Techno- he's talking to Wilbur again, even if he's still a bit awkward about it, and he's eating meals with them again, even if he eats like a bird. Phil still can't get him to come back to the nest- Tommy gets huffy whenever he gently suggests it, he's been sleeping on the couch again- but they're making progress.

He'd like to really cement a bond with Tommy, though. His fondness for Techno is fine- more than fine, it's wonderful, and Techno's clearly growing more fond of him despite his denials- but Phil is going to be his *father*. He can't just piggyback off Techno's successes.

So he makes his way to Techno's favorite bookshop, one of Karl Jacob's many businesses that Ace funds for him. He mentioned this morning that their plan was to go there- Techno could spend hours lost in the stacks, so the only reason they wouldn't be there is if Tommy insisted they leave early.

"No, Techno hasn't been in at all," Karl tells him. "Also, uh, I'm not *banning* you guys, but I kind of don't want to see any of you for, like, a few months. If he wants books or something just send a message to Ace and I'll have it delivered, but-"

Phil doesn't hear him out, already heading outside. Techno left a few hours ago, there's no reason they wouldn't be there by now. He whips out his phone, checking Techno's location-

Why is he in their Badlands base, miles from Kinoko?

He doesn't hesitate to take to the skies again, despite how it might draw a lot of attention. He'll be more sneaky when he gets to the Badlands, but if something happened that made them *run* and *hide*, he needs to get there immediately. He texts Techno on the way, but no response, which just makes him all the more concerned.

Phil lets himself into the base immediately, and can almost instantly hear Tommy. He's very loud, just like he was when he first came to them. "-just one more time!"

"I already did last time, you fixed it just fine then," Techno says, sounding exasperated.

"Yeah, but I wanna try something different, come *on*."

There's another, quieter noise in the background, something almost familiar but not enough for Phil to recognize it as he walks down the hall towards their voices. At least, not until the whimpering gets louder. "Fine," Techno says. "But I don't know why you're so obsessed with this."

Phil throws open the door just in time to watch Techno's axe come down, a tied up man screaming as it carves through his leg, severing flesh and bone. Tommy sits on the edge of a nearby table, his expression going from neutral to alarmed when he notices Phil. "...oh, fuck-"

"*Techno?!?*"

"...uh," Techno turns back, having the gall to look *sheepish* and hold the axe behind him as if Phil didn't just walk in on him *torturing someone* in front of *Tommy*. "Heyyy, Phil." He glances at the screaming man on the ground and shuffles slightly to the side, barely trying to hide him.

"What are you *doing?*" Phil sweeps across the room, stepping over the man without a glance to make his way to Tommy. Tommy tries to get off the table and keep space between him, but Phil isn't allowing that, not this time. He sweeps Tommy into his arms, glaring at Techno. "This is *not* the type of bonding you told me about!"

"Well..." Techno drags out. "I mean, we *were* gonna hit up a bookstore later... I promised I'd buy him some-"

"Don't *tell* him!" Tommy hisses, trying to pull himself out of Phil's arms. Phil just tightens his grip- his fledgling doesn't get to run off when he's been dragged into *torture*. Tommy bristles like a cat, but gives up easily- probably something he's used to now that Techno has started picking him up and moving him around when he's being difficult.

"You *planned* this?" Phil asks incredulously. He expected something like Techno taking advantage of a good opportunity, or maybe it was a request from Ace- but it was *planned* that he would take Tommy to torture someone?

Tommy wriggles around more. "Phiiil, let go, I'll explain-"

Phil refuses, wrapping his wings around him. "You're telling me you *decided* to bring Tommy along to just watch you kill someone? He's *delicate*, you saw how he was when Dream died-"

"He's not delicate," Techno defends himself. "And I didn't choose this, alright, he followed me a few weeks back and proved he could handle it, so-"

“You’ve been doing this for *weeks?!* ” he screeches. “All those days you took my fledgling out, you were bringing him to *this?* ”

Techno glares back at him, a rare occurrence. “He’s not just *yours* , Phil. He’s the Syndicate’s healer. I can take him out if he wants to go out. He’s-”

“He’s just a *fledgling*, Techno, he’s a healer, he shouldn’t be *here-* ”

“It’s good for him!” he interrupts him. Phil is about to get louder, maybe even ground Techno before taking Tommy out of here, but Techno steamrolls over him. “Damn it, Phil, were you even payin’ attention to him before? Theseus has been neglectin’ himself since before he even got to us because he’s used to overusin’ his powers. He didn’t *eat*, Phil, he didn’t *sleep* sometimes, because he needed to get rid of the actual *fuckin’* pain he got when he didn’t use them enough. Lettin’ him heal bigger injuries like this is *good* .”

Phil freezes, still holding Tommy tightly. His fledgling was hurting himself? He’s been so abused and traumatized that the *itch* is a *pain* for him? And Phil didn’t even notice? He’s... he’s been a bad father to him?

“Oh, sh- Phil, no-” Techno sighs. “It’s okay, I’ve been handlin’ it, that’s how he managed to keep it from you- you’re fine, you’re a good caretaker and provider, just lemme-” He reaches out, gently pushing at Phil’s wings, and he lets them relax, lets Techno pull Tommy out of his arms. Tommy stumbles a little, grabbing onto Techno’s arm for a second to steady himself before letting go. “You- do whatever you were planning with the guy. I need to-” Tommy steps over to the man on the ground, while Techno pulls Phil over to a chair and sits him down.

“I... should have known,” he murmurs. And he should have. Phil just left Tommy to sit out of meals even though he wanted him there, thinking that he needed *space* or to make his own *choices*, and the whole time his fledgling was starving himself. Is that why he’s always covered in sunflowers, even when he doesn’t seem injured? Is that why, when he pulls off his gloves, flowers fall out in droves- he’s *always* healing himself? His fledgling is *always* hurt?

“Phil, it’s okay. I promise, I was keepin’ an eye on him. And he’s better now, you’ve seen it. He’s joinin’ us for meals, eatin’ more everyday. He’s gettin’ better, I promise.” There’s a gurgle and a thud from where the victim is on the floor, but the two of them pay it no mind. “Your fledgling is gonna be just fine.”

“But he’s... he shouldn’t be here,” Phil protests weakly. “He shouldn’t see blood and gore, he’s a *healer-* ”

“Yeah, I said that too, and then he Withered a hero without hesitatin’ just to prove me wrong. He’s a tough kid. Hell, he’s *enjoyin’* it, last week he had me cut off a guy’s fingers just to see if he could *grow* them back. He’s powerful, he picks up on things fast, he’s-” Techno cuts himself off.

Phil pauses for a moment too. The room is quiet, other than pained breathing. “He fits in with us well, doesn’t he?” he asks delicately.

“He’s a good employee,” Techno says quickly, too quickly, before stepping back from Phil. “Look, is- are you doin’ okay now?”

He still *hates* himself for not paying enough attention to his fledgling, but it’ll be okay. He’ll make up for it, a hundred times over. “I don’t like that you hid it all from me,” he tells Techno instead of answering directly. “And we’ll be having a longer talk about what sort of things you keep from me later, when we’re at home.” Techno winces. “But for now, why don’t you finish up here? I went looking for you because I had something for us to do.”

“Yeah, sure, I-” Techno turns to look at Tommy. “....Theseus. What are you doin’?”

“Hang on,” Tommy says, a little breathless. “I *think* I’ve- I’ve fucking *got* it-”

Phil stands, glancing past Techno to get a good look. Tommy is kneeled over the man, who’s gone unconscious- either from the pain or from pure *fear*, because Tommy is healing the man’s leg.

Not scabbing over the stump. Not reattaching the leg laying on the floor nearby. New flesh and bone marrow *grows* from the stump, building a new calf. Phil watches with wide eyes as Tommy’s eyes glow bright enough to *blind* as he shapes the ankle, moving it to make sure it works even as the foot builds itself. When it’s done, all the toes in place and moving, Tommy drops the leg and *cackles*. “I fucking *knew* I could!” He scrambles to his feet, which is a poor decision, as he almost immediately wavers. Phil swoops forward, grabbing him and keeping him upright when his knees buckle. “Oh- haha, *shit*, I think that’s- that’s probably, uh, worst- worst I’ve ever healed!” Tommy laughs again, leaning into Phil’s side for support.

“Did. Did you just.” Techno is at a loss for words.

“I fucking *got it*. ” Tommy lets himself be pulled away, Phil taking him to sit down. “Wait- wait, Phil, he’s gotta- you gotta wake him up. He has to be able to, uh, move it and stuff. I gotta know I did all the nerves right.”

“That can wait,” he fusses. “Tommy, you’re *shaking*. ” He wants to take him home *right now*, bundle him in the nest, his fledgling is cold- no, he’s not cold, it’s worse than that, but his instincts are screaming that he is, that he needs to be warmed up.

“From *excitement*, big man, I can fucking grow back *whole limbs*, are you kidding me? This is- I *knew* I could do it, holy *shit*- ”

“You’re shakin’ from overusin’ your powers,” Techno corrects him, sounding worried. “I think we’ve found the limit of what you can do.”

“Yeah, for *now*. Just wait, I’m gonna-”

“*No*, ” Techno cuts him off. “Theseus- overusin’ your powers is how that pain gets worse. I thought we were tryin’ to scale it back, so you could go longer without usin’ it.”

That takes the wind out of Tommy’s sails, and he sinks a little in his chair. “Well, yeah, but- it’s cool, right?”

Techno sighs. “Yeah, Theseus, it’s really cool. Just- take care of yourself *before* worryin’ about stuff like gettin’ stronger. You’re already more powerful than any healer we’ve had before, you don’t have to run around pushin’ yourself. Okay?”

Tommy huffs, disappointed. “...okay.”

“Good.” He reaches out, ruffling Tommy’s hair. “Phil, you said you had somethin’ for us to do?”

“Oh, right,” he says, a little distantly, because his healer just grew an entire human *leg* with nothing but his powers- no sacrifice, no equivalent exchange, just *powers* . “The... the house is finished.”

“You mean the *expansion*, ” Techno says, just to be difficult.

“Yes, the expansion. I wanted to take Tommy out shopping for furniture and decorations for his room.”

“Oh, fuck yeah,” Tommy says tiredly. “I want it to be ugly as fuck. I’m talking whatever hideous shit we can find at Goodwill. I want a ton of fucking, mismatched furniture, and at least three items that never should have existed. And, uh... a big bed,” he yawns. “Like, as big as... as big as your nest...”

“Big enough to fit the whole family?” Phil questions, ignoring how Techno looks at him when he asks.

“Mhm,” he hums, closing his eyes. “Huge.”

“...maybe furniture shopping can wait a day,” Phil murmurs, watching Tommy fall asleep. “Techno, finish up here, will you? I’ll take him out to the car.”

“Might take a bit. I’m gonna have to wake him up, make sure the foot works like Theseus wanted.”

“That’s fine,” he murmurs, gently picking up Tommy. “Try not to take too long. I want to get him back to the nest.”

“...Phil,” Techno sighs. “He’s *not* family.”

“You heard him,” Phil says defensively. “He wants a bed big enough for the *family*-”

“ *The* family. Not *his* family. And he just meant he wanted it to be big. That doesn’t mean he actually wants to fit everyone in it.” Techno lifts his axe again, not looking at Phil. “He works for us, but he’s not *ours*. ”

“He will be,” Phil says with a sense of certainty. “My newest son. Your little brother.”

He hears how Techno’s breath catches. “ *Phil*. You can’t-”

“I can. And I will.” He carries Tommy through the door, glancing back at Techno. “Try to get through your denial, okay, mate? It’ll be a lot easier for all of us when you accept you like him as much as we do. If not more.”

He leaves Techno standing there, with a torn expression on his face.

Chapter End Notes

phil, a bad father, is going to make up for his horrible horrible crimes by smothering the fledgling for at least a few days. rip tommy. rip techno as well it CANNOT be good for your dad to slap you in the face with adoption papers even if you 100% love your new brother

very late in the day update, but i needed to get this posted before going to bed. hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Fundy can tell things are changing.

It's not inherently a bad thing, he guesses. Dad is happy now that Tommy is talking to him again, Grandpa's been more affectionate towards everyone recently, and Fundy's never seen Uncle Techno so fond of someone outside their family. It's just a little... weird, maybe.

Because they're obsessed with him, he thinks. It's like the house is revolving around Tommy, everyone pulled in when Tommy lets them, pushed away when he's not in the mood. Fundy feels like the odd one out, and it makes him nervous. He needs to talk to someone.

Uncle Techno isn't good at feelings, and Dad is *too* good with them. He needs Grandpa, except that for the past day or so he's been sealed up in the nest with Tommy. Fundy doesn't know exactly *what* happened, because he left the house chattering about how Tommy was going to move into his new room, and then he came back with Uncle Techno carrying an unconscious Tommy, so...

Fundy still creeps towards the nest, hoping that either Tommy is asleep or Grandpa can be convinced to leave the nest for at least a *little* bit to talk. When he steps inside, though, Tommy's definitely wide awake, flipping through a book with Grandpa reading over his shoulder. "Uh," he announces himself, and they both look up.

"Oh, hey mate!" Grandpa smiles at him before starting to stand. "Good timing, can you sit here with Tommy for a bit? I need to get us food, but-"

"*Phil*," Tommy complains. "Stop treating me like a fucking *kid*, I can sit alone for ten minutes you fucking birdbrain-"

"I know, Tommy," he cuts him off. "It's just my instincts. Can you be patient with me a little longer?"

Tommy groans, but looks back at his book and flips the page. "Bring back some chocolate."

"Meal first, then snacks," Grandpa says. Fundy tries to speak up, to tell him that he needs to talk to him privately, but Grandpa pats him on the shoulder as he passes. "Thanks, mate, I'll be right back."

...well, he can wait a little longer. Fundy glances down at Tommy, who's ignoring him. He hesitates a moment before joining him in the nest, keeping his distance. The flowers from before are all gone, clearly tossed out after wilting, with no new ones to replace them. It's kind of a shame. The flowers suited the nest, he thinks.

"...what are you reading?" he asks.

“Book.”

“Well. Yeah. I guessed that one.” Tommy huffs, but raises it up for him to look at- oh. ‘Dummy’s Guide to Hybrid Healthcare’. That... is kind of hilarious, actually. “Dummy’s-?”

“It was *literally* the only book the stupid store had that went over avians *and* piglins *and* foxes, and apparently Techno got banned from the good bookstore, so. This.”

Fundy blinks at him. “And foxes?”

Tommy snorts and looks back at it. “Yeah. Obviously.”

“Like. For me.”

“I don’t know any *other* foxes around.”

“Um.” Fundy glances between the book and Tommy. “You know that I’m not part of the... the Syndicate, right? I’m just related to them.”

“I kind of fucking *guessed*. Pretty sure you would have done a background check on Dream if you were actually-” Tommy cuts himself off, probably from saying something especially rude. “I know you’re not part of the Syndicate,” he repeats.

“And you’re the *Syndicate’s* healer.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “Yeah, but that doesn’t mean I’m fucking *bound* to only healing the supervillains. And if you think Wilbur wouldn’t make me heal you anyway, you’re fucking stupid.”

Okay, a fair point. But it still feels weird that Tommy specifically thought of him when he was looking for information. No, not *weird*, it’s just... he didn’t think Tommy was that considerate? Honestly, he didn’t think Tommy was considerate enough to research hybrid medical care anyway.

Then again, Fundy doesn’t actually know anything about Tommy. Not firsthand, anyway. From Clay he was ‘difficult, rebellious’. Dad calls him sweet, his *sunflower*. Is he both? Neither? He should try to get to know him, shouldn’t he? “Do you like it here?” he asks impulsively.

“...what do you mean?” Tommy asks cautiously.

“I mean- here. With the.. Syndicate. Do you like it? Working for them? I mean, Grandpa kind of dragged you in the nest, and he’s keeping you here which you seem... unhappy about, but-”

That gets a surprised laugh out of Tommy. “Foxboy, if the worst these bitches are going to do is throw me in a pile of blankets, I could not give *less* of a shit. I eat whenever I want, I get to go outside, and I’m not fucking *hit* whenever I act like a dick. This? Is fucking *heaven*. I just wish they weren’t all clingy bitches.”

Fundy is frozen, staring at him. Tommy's expression wavers a little when he realizes, changing to something more uncomfortable. "What... did Cla- Dream do to you?" It's heaven to get to *eat*? To be free to go *outside*?

Fundy was eight when his mom died. He loved her a lot, but they didn't have much to their name- the only jobs she took were under the table and usually paid under minimum wage. He was always hungry as a child, and it only got worse when she died. He made himself sick trying to eat things he found in the woods or in other people's trash, and if it weren't for Dad and Grandpa finding him, there's no way he would have kept going for even another week or two.

Coming here was a *luxury*. No children to bully him for having ears and a snout, as much food as he could eat, the comfiest bedding he'd ever felt in his life and new clothes that fit him- and clothes he *liked*, no more skirts he had to wear until they had holes because they couldn't afford to get him pants. It was like a pauper finding out he was secretly a prince.

Later, he'd realized that this home wasn't perfect. Later, he learned all the dark secrets that kept him well fed and surrounded by splendor. It all fell apart, and they're still sewing it back together, but-

But Tommy already knows the worst of it. He won't go through the same thing Fundy did. He can be happy here, with no unpleasant surprises along the way.

"He's- he was a fucking dick," Tommy mutters. "That's all you need to know."

"He wasn't to me," Fundy says, though he immediately realizes how fucked up that is to say. "No, I mean- I'm not doubting you I just mean I don't know what he would have-"

"Yeah, of course he wasn't to you!" he snaps at him. "He didn't have *power* over you the way he did with me, and he fucking- he was using you, so he had to play *nice*, nice enough you'd introduce him to your *dad*. Me, the only thing he needed from me was my power, so he could fuck me up however he wanted as long as I could still *heal* for him." Tommy sinks down, further into the blankets beneath him. "And he was really fucking good at it."

"...oh."

"Yeah, *oh*." Tommy flips another page, though he's definitely not reading it now. "...it's good he broke up with you," he mutters after a minute. "No one deserves- deserved putting up with him. But sorry I didn't tell anyone you were dating him until after they killed him."

"I... understand." And he does. He's never been hurt like that, but if someone controlled his entire life, hurt and starved him, and the only people who could make it stop maybe wouldn't if they knew something only he knew... Fundy probably wouldn't say anything about it either. And besides- "I'm glad you're here. Everyone's- everyone's really happy to have you."

Tommy raises the book higher, hiding his face from Fundy's view. He wonders if he said something wrong for a moment, but- "...really?" he asks quietly. Fundy's about to answer

him, but he gets cut off. “I mean, fucking obviously, Wilbur’s terrified of death or whatever so they’re glad to have a healer, forget I fucking asked-”

“No, I mean- they’re happy to have *you*. I don’t... I don’t think just anyone with healing powers would do.”

Tommy doesn’t respond, and keeps his face hidden, but he can see Tommy’s ears getting red. He bites back a snicker.

It’s not much longer before Grandpa returns, carrying a tray with three bowls of mushroom soup. Tommy puts his book aside, the blush mostly faded from his face, and grabs one of them. Grandpa looks incredibly satisfied as he watches Tommy eat. He then passes another bowl to Fundy. “Did you need something from us, mate, or did you just want to join us?”

He’s not really as worried about Tommy as he was before, so he shrugs. “Um, it’s almost the holidays. Are we doing anything this year?”

Grandpa lights up. “Oh- oh, I completely forgot! It’s been so busy recently- and we haven’t celebrated since you went off to college- absolutely, we simply *have* to do something this year. I’ll tell Techno and Wil.”

“I want my fucking salary for the holidays,” Tommy mutters.

“You still haven’t told us how much you want to get paid, mate. Look, we’ll sort that out soon, but I’ll give you some money early to buy presents for everyone- ah, but don’t fret too much about getting the perfect gift, Techno Wil and I pretty much have whatever we could want.” Which is why they only celebrate when Fundy is around- and now Tommy.

Tommy just hums with a frown, and Fundy leans over. “I’ll help you pick out things for them.”

“I’ve got it, I don’t need your help,” he hisses. “...but we can go together anyway.”

He already has a feeling he knows how this family dynamic is going to go, that Tommy will be *Grandpa’s*, not his dad’s, but there’s an odd part of himself that reminds him- he’s never wanted to be an only child, and Tommy absolutely *feels* like a younger brother. And... wouldn’t it piss off Clay? If his ‘Theo’ liked *Fundy* as a brother more than he liked Clay? Maybe it’s petty to spite a dead man. But thoughts like those are what reminds him-

He really is part of the family.

Chapter End Notes

tommy just like hm this chapter on merling tails is just SO interesting anyway does everyone like me as a person or am i just not annoying enough to get kicked out yet

this chapter is both the twentieth chapter AND the one that breaks 40k words! two milestones in one! i'm amazed at how much i've written in about a month.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Techno hates the holidays. His cottage aesthetic, already marred by the extension, is destroyed further by decorations cluttering all the living areas. He remembers when Phil insisted the Antarctic Empire adopt it into their religion when they conquered some miniscule nation built entirely on luxuries, that manipulated their citizens into purchasing expensive gifts for each other once a year to keep the most wealth in business pockets.

But despite Techno's protests, it was taken, and altered slightly, the garish green and red turning to white and gold, the need to *buy* softening to 'getting or doing something for those you care about'. He had begrudgingly accepted it. And yet, centuries later, it's turned right back into consumerism, the cities going crazy as they have to *buy buy buy*. It makes trips exhausting, which is why Phil really should have realized that Techno wasn't taking Tommy to *shops* much earlier.

Techno sticks to homemade gifts. It's not hard- he's had a lot of time to work on his hobbies, and he's mastered quite a few crafts. The harder part is deciding what to *make*. Wilbur and Phil are easy enough- new sweaters for Wilbur, to replace the older ones that have started to fray, and a new necklace for Phil, a traditional gift that makes Techno's instincts purr.

But Fundy and Tommy. After some deliberating, Techno decides to split Fundy's gift in two. The first is a knife, carefully designed to be easy to hold even with Fundy's claws, the hilt inlaid with delicate gold and emeralds. It won't be something he wants, but it's something he *needs*- and it matches the ones that Techno has made for Wilbur and Phil. The second is a golden ring, one that could be part of a set with the crown he made for him last time they celebrated. This, too, pleases his instincts.

The problem with sating his instincts is that they're never *truly* sated. They always demand more. Which is why, when he tries to decide on a gift for Tommy, he can't get anywhere, his brain focusing on one idea in particular, one that he *can't* give him.

And yet, he seals himself off in his workshop to make it anyway. Techno tries to rationalize it. Maybe the act of making it will be enough to let him *think*. Then he just... doesn't have to give it to him. He can just toss it in his hoard, just one of many pieces of pretty jewelry that would never fit him, but are still beautiful enough to be *his*.

It takes time- smelting the gold, melting it down, reshaping it- then again and again, making sure it would fit his- fit Tommy. Then he has to sort through his jewels, tossing aside ones that he normally adored because they just aren't *good enough*. Only the best for-

For their healer. Just an employee.

When it's done, enough to satisfy him, he has to keep himself locked in his workshop for *hours*, forcing himself to stay put. Otherwise, his feet would have walked him straight to

Tommy, his instincts would have *forced* him to offer it to him. But Techno is stronger than his instincts. He waits it out, until he's able to put it down without wanting to scream.

He still can't think of anything else for Tommy. That actually *does* make him scream- it was a waste of time, a waste of *effort*, because he can't give this to Tommy. He just can't. Absolutely he can't give it in front of Phil and Wilbur or they'll mock him for millennia- no, he can't give it to Tommy at *all*.

Techno almost gives up and goes into town. He genuinely considers it- just buying the kid whatever he finds in a random store that he thinks he might like- but he really hates trying to shop during this season. And also... he doesn't want Tommy to see all the gifts he made for the others, homemade things that he's worked on for days, and then realize he got some commercially made *garbage* that Techno just pulled off a shelf somewhere.

No, he has to *make* him something.

In the end, he whittles a cow figurine out of some oak wood and calls it a day. It's low effort, the thought of giving this to *Tommy* making him feel terrible, but it's all he can do. Tommy will like it anyway, he thinks- he's rattled off about cows being his favorite animal a few times by now, so at least he'll know Techno listens to him. It's *something*.

He enters the living room with a sense of dread on the day of. He's the last to join the family- and Tommy- but they don't get started until Techno has joined, awkwardly sitting on the couch with Tommy. Tommy, who's curled up on the edge, looking uneasy. There's a pile of poorly-wrapped presents between them- definitely Tommy's work, as even Wilbur isn't *that* terrible.

Phil coos when everyone is together. "Are we ready to trade gifts? Oh, let me go first-"

"Not a chance, old man," Wilbur says with a grin. He's already handing something off to Fundy.

Techno doesn't join the argument, nor does he pay much attention to the gifts going around. He only notices when people hand him things- a gift bag from Wilbur with a book of mythology to add to his already obscenely large collection, earrings from Phil that he immediately replaces his current earrings with, a box from Fundy full of hair accessories- a joke gift, but he still adds a simple golden hairpin to his braid. The entire time, he mostly thinks about the damned *cow figure* tucked into his bag.

He waits it out, wanting to put it off as long as possible, but he only realizes a little late that that means Tommy will be giving out his own gifts before then. Tommy is clearly nervous as he passes them out, but the reactions are all positive. Wilbur's eyes light up when he unwraps a series of poorly-made bookmarks with flowers he clearly pressed himself. Fundy thanks Tommy with a small smile and keeps the fox plushie in his lap. Phil trills with delight when he finds a soft, weighted blanket, and immediately puts the gift-giving on pause for him to set it up in the nest.

The wait while Phil is gone just makes Tommy more twitchy, and he holds the last box tightly as he tries very hard not to look at Techno. ...at least Tommy is as nervous about his

gift as Techno is. Hopefully it's something completely underwhelming, so Techno won't feel as bad about his own lacking gift.

When Phil returns, Tommy shoves the box into Techno's hands like it's a bomb. "It's not that- I mean, everyone said that you have a ton of shit like this, so I thought maybe you'd like it, but also it's not that special so don't get your hopes too fucking high about it-" he rambles as Techno removes the wrapping paper.

Inside he finds a familiar box- one of the ones from his favorite jeweler from Snowchester. Techno hesitates to open it- it can't be anything *too* good, he convinces himself, it can't be too meaningful, Tommy said it himself, he only got it because he was told Techno likes jewelry, he doesn't know-

It's a golden crown. A beautiful, elegant thing, inlaid with *diamonds*. Emeralds are his favorite gems, they always have been, ever since the first time Phil gave him one, but *diamonds*. The light blue makes his breath catch, and he glances up at Tommy, who's watching him warily, his eyes just faintly glowing the same color.

He'll never be able to look at this crown without making the comparison. Tommy has given him jewelry to remind Techno of him *always*, it's- it's too precious to have out here. It's too important, he has to-

Techno gets to his feet, almost stomping out of the room. Tommy makes a shocked noise behind him, and there's some shuffling as he starts to get up, but as Techno leaves he can hear Phil cooing. "No, mate, he likes it- he likes it a *lot*, he's taking it to-"

The hoard. It has to go straight to his hoard. It needs to be safely tucked away in his hoard. When it's taken its place- when he's tossed aside some *random*, *worthless* crown he stole some time in the past to gently lay Tommy's crown onto a pillow for safekeeping- Techno looks around, almost *wild*. The cow figurine is *nothing*. It's garbage, he's going to *burn* it. Tommy needs something better, so much better-

He starts collecting all of the pieces of his hoard that are too small for him, pretty things that caught his eye but have sat around useless for far too long. He chuffs, imagining Tommy absolutely *covered* in gold, necklaces draped around his neck, rings covering each and every finger, bracelets up to his upper arms. It's too much to carry out to the living room-

And it's a ridiculous idea, a more reasonable part of his brain says. It would be much better to bring Tommy *here*, to the hoard, to dress him up and sit him here amongst the luxuries. Instead, he only brings back one item- the thing he made for him, the one he should have brought Tommy in the first place. Why did he even try to hold back from giving it to him?

"Aw, see, mate, here he is, it's fine! Find a good place for it?" Phil asks smugly, but Techno ignores him, making his way straight back to Tommy. Tommy's still wary as he returns, which is *wrong*- he shouldn't be wary of *Techno*, of all people. Techno is- he's not a threat, he'll keep Tommy *safe*, safe with his hoard and-

It takes a moment for Techno to shake those thoughts enough to hold out his gift. He can hear Phil and Wilbur's snickering and Fundy's gasp, but he couldn't care less, busy watching

Tommy's reaction.

Tommy looks at it, his eyebrows furrowing in confusion before he glances back at Techno.
“Uh, I don't-?”

Before Techno can register the rejection, Phil speaks up again. “It's for you, Tommy. Take it.” Tommy still hesitates, and Techno wavers, suddenly unsure- is it not good enough? Is *he* not good enough?

But Tommy reaches out, accepting the bracelet. He looks it over, his eyes catching on the emeralds that Techno had carved, laying them into the gold to take the shape of a flower and leaves. He *likes* it, likes the jewelry Techno made for him, the symbol that he's one of the Syndicate, one of *them*-

Tommy looks at Techno one last time before slipping it on, sealing the deal.

He accepted it. Accepted being Techno's shoat- Techno's sounder- Techno's *treasure*.

Joy bubbles up inside him, so much so that if Wilbur were speaking he would assume it was his doing. But no, it's entirely his own, the piglin part of his brain purring up a storm at his treasure accepting him as a *Protector*. He sits back on the couch, closer to Tommy this time, and it takes all he has to not sweep his shoat into his arms-

Wait. Why is he trying to hold back?

Because Tommy is just- he's just-

Oh. *Fuck*.

Techno's eyes dart around- Phil looks smug yet again, Wilbur is stifling laughter, Fundy's shocked, and his- no, *Tommy* is confused. Reasonably so, because Techno just *lost his mind* and gave him a sounder gift- something he probably doesn't even understand- just because Tommy unintentionally did the same.

He thought it was fine. He thought he could stifle the way he wanted to protect Tommy, he thought he could still keep arguing against Phil and Wilbur, he thought- he thought a lot of things. But Tommy gave him a sounder gift, and he gave one back, and that's- he's-

Fuck. He's *family*.

“Uh... you okay, big man?” Tommy asks. “You look like you're freaking the fuck out.”

“He's fine,” Wilbur barely gets out between snickers, Techno almost relaxing with the amusement radiating from it.

But Techno needs to answer Tommy, and he has to sound like a person while he does it, instead of just chuffing. He clears his throat. “Uh. Yeah. Piglin thing. Hard to... hard to part with a piece of the hoard,” Techno says, coming up with an excuse on the fly.

Tommy frowns, hand going to the bracelet. “You can take it back, big man, you didn’t have to give me jewelry just because I got you a crown-”

“Yes he did,” Phil murmurs, but Techno barely hears it.

“*No*, ” he growls, his hand grasping Tommy’s wrist to keep him from taking it off. Tommy freezes, and Techno does too- no, he *scared* him, he’s supposed to *protect* him- Techno immediately lets go, though he wasn’t holding on tightly in the first place. “That’s, uh- another piglin thing. Rude to... reject gifts. Uh, two different instincts fightin’ each other is why I’m... I’ll be fine in a minute,” he lies.

“Oh.” Tommy pulls his arm back, looking over the bracelet again, fingers tracing over the finer details. Techno has to close his eyes for a moment to stop watching him appreciate the gift-

He’ll like the other pieces of the hoard too, the piglin part of him whispers. But this gift was just the thing to bring him into the sounder. It’s perfect. *Perfect*.

Techno takes a deep breath and lets it out before passing out the other gifts all at once. He’s too drained to give them out one by one, needing to return to his den to try to process everything. Wilbur immediately pulls off the sweater he’s wearing to try on one of the ones he made, Phil has Fundy help him put on his necklace, Fundy looks over the knife with an odd sort of curiosity-

“Oh, fuck, this is poggers!” Tommy exclaims, looking over the stupid cow figurine. “Awww, look at her little horns, *look-* ” Tommy scoots closer, leaning into his side to show him his own woodworking. “And her spots are so neat, I used to know a cow that had those exact same spots! Where did you *get* this? ”

“Techno makes all his gifts himself,” Phil says, eyeing the figure with displeasure. He probably already figured out that Techno tried to make a terrible gift just to *avoid* what happened today, but as long as he keeps it to himself until later... “Must not have taken him that long to make.”

Tommy gasps softly. “You *made* her? Wh- that is so fucking cool! Techno, my guy, you absolutely have to show me how you did it! You- fuck, you have to teach *me* how to make a cow!”

The thought of taking Tommy to his workshop, sitting him down and carefully teaching his shoat how to use a knife to carve wood- it’s a bit overwhelming. He’d done the same with Wilbur when he was a child, though he was never made for the rough arts, always more taken up with music. Tommy, though, he might *love* it, love the act of taking a material and forcing it into a new shape, turning it into something beautiful.

But it took him decades to perfect his skills. It would take so *long* to teach Tommy to make things the way Techno does, starting from the basics and working his way to perfectly carved animals or carefully tempered jewelry. It would take up most of Tommy’s lifespan, most likely, if that was even enough time.

But he's *sounder* now. Family. There's no way the others would let him *keep* his mortal lifespan- there's no way *Techno* would.

"Sure. I'll teach you."

Chapter End Notes

i can finally take 'just an employee' out of my discord status because tommy has officially been UPGRADED

rip to techno though his reputation will never recover now that phil and wilbur know he put a ton of effort into making tommy a sounder gift right after claiming that tommy would never be family

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur takes his seat at the table, smirking over at Techno. Techno, of course, refuses to make eye contact with anyone at the table, because Tommy fucking *got him*.

He had no idea that taking Tommy and Fundy out to shop a few days ago would be so lucrative. Sure, he was looking for suggestions of what to get for Tommy, since Techno had shot down the idea of killing Pandas for his vinyls- only because he wanted Tommy to join him when it happened- but that was his only evil plan of the day.

Wilbur had mentioned jewelry offhandedly, not even thinking about how Techno could take it, but Tommy was the one to settle on the crown that would do the job. It was stupidly expensive, and Wilbur had almost just broken the glass to take it instead, but Tommy handed over almost all of the money Phil had given him to purchase it rightfully. Tommy's eyes lit up at the way the diamonds caught the light as he turned it around in his hands, and then he tucked it away carefully, ready to be wrapped up.

And look at Techno now. A mess, because their baby brother gave him a *sounder gift*. And then, he whipped out a sounder gift of his own that he had clearly made just for Tommy! He really wasn't fooling *anyone*. Though he's clearly still trying, from how he's dragged himself away from patrolling outside Tommy's room to join them. He's nervously tapping the table, eyes on the hallway to the new extension, and Wilbur just *knows* that if he spoke, he would reek of *protective-anxiety* from being away from the brand new sounder member this soon.

"How's it going, Techno?" Wilbur asks, smug.

"Shut it," he growls, and of course, Wilbur was entirely right about how he's feeling.

"Don't take it out on Wilbur, mate," Phil hums as he hands out drinks to everyone at the table. "You're the one who suppressed your instincts until it was too much for you."

"Shut. It. Phil."

Wilbur laughs. "Are we not even allowed to talk about it? You were the last hold out, you know-"

"That's not true," Techno huffs, looking at Fundy almost desperately. "Fundy, weren't you?"

Fundy takes a sip of tea to hide his smile. "Not really."

Techno groans, but Phil just pats him on the shoulder and takes a seat as well. "Come on, come on. I know you're recovering from the blow to your ego-"

"Oh, give me a break!"

“-but we *do* need to talk about this.” Phil sips his own hot chocolate. “I already know where Wilbur stands on the idea of offering Tommy eternity.” Techno immediately sits up straight. “Techno. Fundy. Thoughts?”

Techno hesitates for a moment, but he’s still the first to speak up. “He wants to learn wood carvin’, and I want to see if he’d like metal workin’, or potion makin’ too.” His anxiety from before has mostly faded, replaced with *protective-fondness-hope*. “It’d take a long time to learn.”

“I’ll take that as a third yes, then.” Phil glances at Fundy.

“...I mean, I... still don’t know if I’m... I mean, probably? But I don’t know if my word should count here-”

Wilbur cuts him off. “Your word always counts, starlight. We want to hear your thoughts.”

Fundy sighs at the old nickname, but he can’t hide the *pleased-fondness* when he speaks again. “I like Tommy. And... I think it’d really piss off Clay- um, Dream- that he’s *our* family. Plus, um, I don’t know how the afterlife works, but if there is one, I kind of want to keep Tommy away from wherever C- Dream would be, and eternity is... pretty much the only guarantee.”

Phil smiles and reaches over to run a hand through Fundy’s hair. “Then we’re unanimous. How do we bring it up to him?”

Techno grunts. “I don’t know. He’s- there’s no way he knows he’s... he’s family yet.”

Fundy nods. “A week ago, he was surprised when I said we liked having him around. *Really* surprised. He thought you guys were just glad to have a healer around.”

Techno slams his mouth shut, probably holding back a growl at the thought. Wilbur still doesn’t really *get* Techno’s instincts, but he bets ‘the babiest sounder member thinks I don’t really want him’ sets off something bad in him. He grips the edge of the table, almost standing up, but stops himself.

“We can fix that,” Wilbur says. “We’ll have time. I say we just offer it to him when he wakes up tomorrow.”

Phil hums unsurely. “I don’t know about that. He’s so young, he probably doesn’t even have a *concept* of what eternity means. It needs to be enticing, too- we need to keep coaxing him, make *sure* he’d want to stay with us forever.”

“Oh, come on!” Wilbur leans back in his chair. “He’s- god, Phil. He was *happy* today. Not completely, there was still a lot of nervousness, and a bit of fear when he thought Techno didn’t like the crown-” Techno snaps off a piece of the table, but Wilbur ignores it. Techno can fix that tomorrow. “-but I could tell he was *happy*. And I don’t think he’s been happy in a long time. We want to ask him soon, before he gets used to it. We don’t want him to start taking it for granted.”

“Shouldn’t we want him to take it for granted?” Fundy asks, *confusion-unsure*. “I mean, if we want him to be happy here anyway...”

Wilbur leans back a little further. Phil shakes his head, clearly wanting to scold him for it. “We *do*... but happiness being *new* is going to make him more... agreeable? Agreeable, I guess.”

“Eternity isn’t something we should trick him into,” Phil disagrees. “I want him to know what he’s getting into, even if it takes a few years. I think we should just continue as is. If we make him happy, he’ll want to stay, whether happiness is *new* to him or not.”

Techno grumbles, but his head shoots up and looks towards the hall. Wilbur follows his gaze and, in the darkness, spots a figure approaching. It stops when it gets close enough to see into the kitchen. “Uh.” Tommy looks around before stepping into the kitchen. “Sorry, just-grabbing a drink,” he mutters, *fear-unease* in his words.

“You’re fine,” Wilbur says quickly. “I thought you went to sleep?”

“Yeah.” Wilbur frowns a little as the unease grows. “Just got thirsty.”

“Do you want tea or hot chocolate, mate?” Phil offers. “You can join us, if you like. None of us were very tired yet.”

Tommy hesitates, but takes a seat with them. They’ll need to get more chairs, Wilbur thinks idly. The only reason there’s enough now is because Techno had a weird fascination with making furniture around the time Phil met Ranboo and Tubbo, and that was enough to get him to build extra chairs for them. If they start coming by again, they’ll need new seats. “What’s up?” Tommy asks when it’s quiet for a little too long. “I’m almost starting to think something’s wrong.” Wilbur can tell he isn’t joking.

“Nothing’s wrong,” Wilbur tells him. They just can’t continue their last conversation with Tommy in the room- not that he knows that. Though Wilbur wants to tell him- wants to *offer*. Honestly, even if Phil thinks it’d take him years to decide, they could still offer *now*. It’s ridiculous not to, honestly.

Still, no one speaks up, and Tommy doesn’t touch his hot chocolate. He starts to stand up. “Actually, I think I’ll just go back to sleep-”

“No,” Techno cuts him off. He’s covering the broken part of the table with his hand, but he looks like he’s going to break off another piece. “You can stay.”

“Look, clearly you guys were talking about something *important* that you don’t want me to hear about, so I’ll just-” His voice is too *bitter*; that and the fear mixed together almost hurt after the bright warmth of his happiness this morning.

You know what? Fuck Phil. “You’re half right,” Wilbur says.

Phil looks at him, confused. “Wilbur-”

“I mean, we were talking about something important, but we just weren’t sure *when* to talk to you about it.”

“*Wilbur-*”

“What do you mean?” Tommy asks, still standing by his seat.

Wilbur smiles up at him. “Sunflower, how would you feel about being *eternal*?”

For a long moment, Tommy just stares at him blankly, like the words didn’t reach him at all. Right when Wilbur’s smile starts to waver, when he worries he’s made another mistake somehow, maybe stumbled onto a whole new *minefield* he didn’t know about, Tommy blinks. “What?”

Longing.

He’s said it before and he’ll say it a thousand more- his sunflower is *so sweet*. “It’s okay if you don’t know. Fundy’s been considering it for years, you can take as long as you want to decide.” As long as he decides *yes*. “But we want to put it on the table.”

“You- uh-” Tommy glances around, his *confusion* clear even if Wilbur didn’t use his powers. “Seriously?”

“Wilbur,” Phil says through gritted teeth, and *oh*, he might actually be in a little trouble here- “We were going to ask when he was *ready*, not surprise him in the middle of the night.”

“I know, I know, but he didn’t like being left out,” Wilbur whines, and Techno huffs, clearly agreeing with him. “And besides, Fundy knew it was an open offer at thirteen, Tommy can handle it at sixteen.”

“That’s *different*, I wouldn’t have let it happen until he was at *least* eighteen-”

“Hold on!” Tommy interrupts. When he has their attention, he crosses his arms. “Look, I know you guys want a healer, but-” When Techno tries to speak up, he just raises his voice to talk over him. “-but I agreed to work for you guys my whole life when I thought I’d have, like, a *normal lifespan*. If you guys are offering to make me fucking immortal or whatever, I want to renegotiate.”

“That’s fine, of course, we can talk about it in the morning-” Phil falls all over himself to agree, trying to get the conversation over with faster-

But Wilbur cuts him off, laughing. “Sunflower, we’re not offering to make you immortal just because you’re a healer. We want *you*!” The room goes uncomfortably quiet. Tommy is staring at him. Most of his family is, too, and he suddenly realizes that was... maybe the minefield he was trying to avoid. “I-I mean, Tommy, we... Fundy told you we like having you around, right? We like *you*, not just your powers.”

“... *what*?”

It's just a whisper, but the wave of *FEAR* feels like it could physically knock him back as it sweeps over him, and he tips his chair a little too far back. Somewhere, he recognizes the undercurrent of *longing* in Tommy's words, but he's a little more concerned about his fucking chair falling, and how he smacks the back of his head on a cabinet.

"*Wilbur*," Phil says worriedly, quickly leaving his chair to check on him. Fundy grabs an ice pack from the freezer, and Techno is either doing nothing or just being very quiet, but Wilbur's eyes are just on Tommy- Tommy, who's standing in the same spot, like he was frozen in place.

"I'm fine, I'm fine, fuck, sorry," Wilbur hisses as he presses the ice pack to the back of his head. He quickly gets to his feet, approaching Tommy. "Look, we-"

Tommy takes a step back. "What did you mean?"

Wilbur winces more at the *fear*; he doesn't want to be the cause of it, he didn't *mean* to- "I mean what I said, Tommy, we like you. You're- I mean, you fit in with us so well. Like- you're like another member of the *family*-"

"No," Tommy says, even quieter this time.

"You are, sunflower. Phil already sees you as his fledgling, like another son-"

"That was just his- his fucked up bird instincts or whatever-"

"No, it's that he *adores* you. Techno, he loves teaching you all his... fucked up torture shit-"

Tommy steps back again, even though Wilbur hasn't come any closer. "He just said I'm a *fast learner*-"

"Yeah, but he doesn't give sounder gifts he made himself to any *fast learner* he meets on the street." Wilbur gestures to the bracelet still around his wrist- Tommy didn't even take it off to go to sleep- and Tommy's wide eyes look down at it too as he realizes its real worth. That it's a true sign of him being theirs. "And Fundy might have only just met you, but he still wanted you to stay with us for eternity."

"That's- he's fucking-" Tommy's breathing has gone wrong, just like when he realized that Wilbur used his powers on him, but- he hasn't done anything this time, he's just *talking*, he shouldn't be bringing out something like this, he has to *fix it*-

"And I love you, sunflower. I promised you'd be safe and happy here, remember? Weren't you so happy this morning? You'll never have to fear someone raising a hand to you, you'll never want for anything, you'll be one of *us*, Dad's youngest son, *my* little brother-"

"Shut *up!*" Tommy's voice, *FEAR-FEAR-LONGING*, breaks as he stumbles backwards. Wilbur feels like he might puke. "You're... you're fucking insane, you're not- you're a fucking- Techno, you said-"

"Theseus," Techno says, finally standing up. "He's... telling the tr-"

“You *said*, ” he hisses, *betrayal* sinking into his voice . “You *said* it, you fucking promised- I’m not a friend, I’m not f-fucking *family*, I’m an employee, you *promised*- ”

“I... know, Theseus, but that was before I-”

“Don’t *fucking* - fucking *lie* to me-” Tommy’s struggling to breath, and Techno tries to cross the room, reaching towards him. Wilbur would do the same, but the fear is so *sharp*, so overwhelming, he thinks he’ll collapse if he takes a single step. When his hand almost touches Tommy’s shoulder, Tommy lashes out, slapping Techno’s hand away. He stumbles again, grabbing the doorframe to the hall to keep him steady. “You fucking- you just want a healer, you don’t want *me*, don’t fucking lie to me, don’t call me family, you fucking *promised*, you *promised* me!”

“Fledgling, *please*, ” Phil says, unintentionally cutting himself off with a distressed chirp.

Tommy chirps right back at him, and the world freezes.

And then he’s gone.

Chapter End Notes

WELCOME TO THE END OF ARC 2

the next chapter may take a while, im maybe a third through it and its already over 3k

hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

warning: this chapter details mental and physical child abuse, as well as light suggestions of suicidal tendencies.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Theseus was eight when he got his powers.

A farmer at the edge of L'manberg was a foster parent, and he always had a few kids staying with him. They helped with the farm- never more than they could handle- and in exchange they could stay as long as they didn't cause any trouble. Theseus had always been a troublemaker- he made loud weird noises when he was happy or sad, and jumped off high places, and stole things he wanted- but he tried so hard to be good for the farmer, because when he was good, he was allowed to take care of the cows.

Henry had been his favorite. Her name was actually Betsy or something stupid like that, but Theseus had secretly renamed her Henry. His only friend, another one of the fosters, told him it was dumb, but he always called her Henry too, so he couldn't have thought it was *too* dumb.

But then Henry got sick. She wasn't walking around much, so she couldn't make it to the grass, and Theseus had to start hand-feeding her fruits to make sure she was eating enough. She stopped producing milk, and he'd overheard the farmer talk about sending her away, and Theseus... Theseus panicked.

People usually get their powers when they're at least teenagers. Healers are usually the only outliers- for some reason, they almost always come in younger. Nowadays, he thinks that it's because only a kid can have a truly selfless urge to help others, because he would have given *anything* to help Henry.

So he snuck out in the middle of the night, breaking into the barn and curling up next to her. He just wanted to spend whatever time he could get with her before the farmer sent her away to who knows where, but then he had rested a hand on her side, and-

He fixed her. He didn't know how, his powers still too weak for him to even recognize what he was healing, but when he dropped his hand, exhausted, she was all better- and she let him know it, too, mooing up a storm, enough to wake the whole barn, and then the farmer, too.

The farmer had stormed into the shed, assuming there was an intruder, but instead he found Theseus, clutching a bouquet of buttercups while he cried tired tears of joy.

It was only a day later that a *hero* came to talk to him- the number one hero of the time, the *Captain*. He always thought she was so cool, and she treated him like a grown up as she sat down to talk to him. No baby talk, like his social worker, and no exasperation like his teachers. She told him that he had a very powerful gift. That healers were rare, and healers who could heal *animals* or *sickness* were even rarer. She looked a little sad when she told him she'd like him to come with her, because he could be a hero like her, saving people who were hurt or protecting other heroes.

But Theseus didn't want to go. He didn't even want to heal people, which made the Captain look confused when he told her. He wanted to stay with Henry and his friend. When his social worker tried to insist, tried to grab his hand and pull him into the Captain's car, he *bit* her and ran up to the room he shared with his friend, shutting himself in the closet and refusing to come out until his friend promised they were gone.

The farmer tried to bring it up a few more times, but Theseus ignored him, and started taking care of the cows whether the farmer said he could or not. It wasn't long before he got a new social worker, his old one refusing to return after she had to go to the hospital to stitch up his bite.

The day he met his new social worker, Miss Puffy, she introduced him to *Clay*.

Clay was so nice. He was only eighteen, normally too young to adopt, but he was a special case, Miss Puffy told him. Theseus felt more comfortable around him than he did any of the few adults who had tried to speak to him in the past, so he nodded shyly and went out for a walk to get to know Clay.

Clay was so *cool*. He listened to Theseus when he talked about school, or the farm, or his thoughts on which color M&M tasted the best, and in exchange he talked about his best friend, and his cool apartment, and how he thought Theseus was a nice kid. Theseus liked him.

He started coming by all the time, and Theseus's friend got jealous, but Theseus didn't care, because Clay liked him too. He liked him enough to talk about *adopting* him, not as a son but as his little brother. Theseus loved the farm, and he loved sharing a room with his friend, but Clay was the first adult that liked him, even though he was 'high energy' and 'annoying'. Eventually, he agreed, and Miss Puffy gave him a sad smile that was almost familiar when he told her.

When the papers were all signed, Theseus's friend cried and clung to him, and Theseus wasn't *clingly* but he hugged him back just as tight, promising him that he would come back to visit, that Clay said he could come by at least once a week to see him if not more. His friend, still crying, pushed two big discs into his hands- they were the only things he had from his father, but he insisted that Theseus take them, so they could give them back and forth whenever they visited each other.

Then Clay took Theseus home, but his apartment wasn't in an apartment building. It was in the *Hero Organization Headquarters*. Theseus had been confused, and then a little afraid, but Clay was so nice and gentle when he explained that he was a hero. That he wasn't *allowed* to

tell Theseus until he was adopted, but that it was okay because it was the safest place in the world, and Theseus needed to be safe, so he couldn't go back to the farm for a little while.

He said that Theseus would never have to want for anything, because Clay was rich, even though he was still just a brand new hero. He said he'd be safe. He'd be happy. He just had to not cause any trouble for any other heroes he met while he was here-

But he had to start going by a new name. Clay picked it out for him- *Theo*. He told Theseus that he had a very cool name, but that there were villains out there who could do evil magic if they knew his name, so Theseus couldn't let anyone know what it was. Even if he was safe here, he was only safe if he kept his name a *secret*.

And he trusted Clay. So he was Theo.

Theo liked to watch TV. There wasn't one at the farm, and his foster homes before there usually didn't let him use it, because they didn't like him or because their real kids wanted to use it or because he was bad. But Clay was out a lot between training and patrolling, so Theo could sit on the couch and watch cartoons or whatever else he wanted.

He was watching the news the first time Clay got hurt really badly. Before then, it had only ever been scratches- Clay would come home, an odd look in his eye as he showed off a cut or a scrape, but that was all. But he'd been stabbed, badly, and the Captain came to get him because he was Clay's *little brother*.

But really, it was because he was a healer. He was brought into the headquarters' hospital wing, and there'd been so much blood. Theo watched it drip onto the floor as the Captain cried, pleading for him to help her *duckling*, and he kept his eyes on the puddle as he reached out, putting a hand on Clay's arm.

He wasn't allowed to keep the poppies. He wasn't allowed to stay, either, sent back to Clay's apartment in the building to sit alone while Clay talked to the other heroes. He curled up on the couch, suddenly so tired, and fell asleep.

Clay had woken him up with a hug, pulling him into his arms and telling him he couldn't have a better little brother. Theo just hummed as Clay praised him, a distant part of him happy to be wanted even if he felt so numb after seeing his older brother bleeding out.

From then on, Clay would gently prod him into healing even those little scrapes he got during training. It was like Theo was getting training of his own, he said, because soon he wouldn't get so tired when he had to heal. He brought over one of his friends, too, his best friend *Gogy*, a hero just like him. Clay liked Gogy a lot, so when Gogy hurt himself during fights, he'd ask Theo if he could patch him up too, and he would, because his brother wanted him to.

He was tired a lot, but Clay was right- he was always right. Eventually, he got less and less tired. By his tenth birthday, it took multiple broken bones before he'd fall asleep mid-healing. Clay was hurt more and more often, but he told Theo it was okay- he was just fighting stronger villains, and being a little less careful, because sometimes being careful meant that innocent citizens would get hurt, and they didn't have a healer like Clay did.

So every day Theo sat on the couch and watched the news. Sometimes, Miss Puffy would come by and try to teach him like he was still in school, but it was hard to focus when he knew Clay was out fighting monsters. She understood, though, and she told him that she was so, so sorry that he had to work so hard all the time. She told him she wished she could have sent him somewhere else, and he cried, and she cried with him.

When he told Clay what she said, she didn't come back, and Theo had to start learning from videos and worksheets instead.

He was twelve when he realized he didn't remember the last time Clay called him his brother. Clay was twenty-two, and he was starting to get upset a lot, but he was still always right. Theo was a better healer, but a bad kid. He was too hyper from being inside all the time, and he made too many weird noises for no reason, and he always got into Clay's things because he was so *bored* all the time. He was always in trouble, except when he was healing Clay, or Gogy, or Clay's new friend Sapnap. If he was healing, he was good. If he wasn't, he was bad.

But he wasn't healing enough, because he was too bad for Clay to call him his brother. He didn't remember the last time Clay had said it, but he did remember when it changed- when Clay called him his *best friend* instead.

Theo was his best friend, he promised. Gogy was a different kind of friend, but Theo was *best*, even when he was bad. Theo felt like he had been slapped, but Clay hadn't slapped him, not that day. He'd been good. He'd been *so* good as he sewed together the holes in Gogy's stomach, ripped through by the Warden's trident. But Clay still didn't call him his brother.

He was sent to walk back to the apartment alone, Clay staying back to sit with Gogy even though he was fully recovered, and Theo had curled onto the couch and cried as quietly as he could. He tried to remember what it was like to be praised when he did a good job.

At fourteen, Dream found that stupid fucking *book*.

He'd come home with it one day, and told Theo that if he touched it he'd be in more trouble than he'd ever been in his *life*. Dream was rarely home before then, telling Theo he had to be more *self-sufficient* so Sapnap didn't have to babysit him all the time, but also getting mad when he cooked himself something that Dream wanted to eat, or when he did the laundry a little wrong because he had to teach himself to do it, or when the couch looked gross because Theo had slept on it for days and he didn't have the energy to shower, let alone clean up.

But now that he had the book, Dream was home more often. Theo had to be quiet, and stay in his bedroom so he wouldn't get in Dream's way, but he also had to be out of his room whenever Dream wanted him so Dream didn't have to go out of his way to get him. He was so tired, even though healing never tired him out anymore.

He'd grown powerful enough that sometimes he wondered if he could heal someone who was dead. Sometimes he wondered what would happen if *he* died. He thought about death a little too much for a fourteen year old, maybe.

But Dream was so excited over the book, so even if Theo wasn't allowed to touch it, at least Dream was in a better mood as he talked about what it said, what it could *do*. It was that evil

magic he'd warned Theo about so much when he was little, but Dream loved the book anyway.

Theo thought about death a lot. It was weird timing that a book about death would show up just then. He wasn't allowed to touch it, but he was so *curious*, and he was left alone because all three of them were supposed to be out on patrol, so he picked the book off the kitchen table ever so carefully and opened it up-

Just as Dream opened the front door, Gogy and Sapnap right behind him.

His arm was twisted, forcing him to drop it, but Dream just kept *twisting*, and it cracked, once and then again, and he *screamed* because Dream had hit him, Dream hit him all the time but this was *different*-

Gogy laughed awkwardly, telling Dream he went overboard, and Theo's eyes were watering but they met Sapnap's anyway, and Sapnap-

Sapnap was mean. He made fun of Theo all the time for being too tired to shower, or for being loud, or when he said something dumb because his mouth moved faster than his brain. But for as mean as Sapnap was, he still looked horrified, like something was *wrong*.

Maybe this was wrong.

Theo slept through his fifteenth birthday. He slept through most of being fifteen. Gogy didn't like watching him.

When he was sixteen, he was allowed to be awake more often, Dream claiming he should be more mature even though it felt like no time passed at all to him. He was, though. He sat on the couch and healed whenever he was told to. He stifled any weird sounds he wanted to make, because making sound was bringing attention to himself and bringing attention just made him go back to sleep. He never wanted to sleep again.

Sapnap was allowed to keep an eye on him again, at least, and it'd been one of those nights where he just broke. Theo didn't even know what caused it. He was just so tired, but he was so afraid to go to sleep, and Sapnap had said his name but it wasn't his name and he just collapsed, *sobbing*.

Sapnap was so awkward about it as he patted his back, but it was the first time someone had touched him without hurting him in so long, the only time someone reached out to him instead of him being forced to reach out to *them* to heal. He stuttered through trying to cheer him up, telling him if he hated the name Theo so much, maybe he could pick a new one. He didn't always have to stick to the same thing forever. He had options.

He had *options*.

He'd never thought about options before. He spent half his life with Dream, he didn't get to make choices, he didn't get to think about *other options*. But there were other people out there who needed healers, didn't they? There were other places besides the Hero Organization Headquarters. There were *options*.

There was the Syndicate. The worst villains in existence. *Monsters* that had almost killed Dream and Gogy and Sapnap a dozen times over. No one would look for him there. No one would *get* to him there. Even monsters were better than staying with Dream.

He chose the name Tommy that night, and Sapnap nodded and kept patting his back. He didn't realize what he'd set in motion.

It wasn't hard to leave. Tommy never *tried* before, so no one bothered to stop him. People in the elevator assumed he was going somewhere for Dream. The people by the exit had never seen him before. He walked outside, and he felt like a starved flower finally seeing the sun .

He'd stolen from Dream before he left, a quiet *fuck you* to echo behind the louder *FUCK YOU* of leaving. Sunglasses to cover his glowing eyes. Gloves a little too big, to hide flowers in when he healed himself- and prime, he was *healing himself*, no one was stopping him- and he had the book. The stupid, fucked up, valuable book-

From the library of JSchlatt. Tommy watched the news. He'd seen both JSchlatt's criminal trial and the divorce one. He knew that Ace was his ex-husband, that he'd probably trade anything for a chance to one-up his ex, and so Tommy hitchhiked his way to Las Nevadas.

Ace was nice. Not the sweet, soft niceness that Tommy had nightmares about, but a genuine way, where he was only *so* nice. At the end of the day, he was a businessman, and Tommy was his temporary partner, so Ace *had* to treat him well. It gave him a new appreciation for business relationships.

As grateful as he was for the book, Ace was hesitant to introduce him to the Syndicate. At least, until Tommy offered to prove it. Ace had paused for a moment, before asking what Tommy could *really* heal. He doubted all the ways that Tommy had bragged- fair, but they were all true, so when Ace asked if he could fix brain trauma, he shrugged and said he would give it a shot.

Ace brought him to cells hidden deep beneath the beauty of Las Nevadas, and Tommy walked straight in, only to find a familiar face- the hero Chronos. They'd never spoken, but he saw him on the news often enough, and he'd passed him in the hospital wing more than once- he'd heard bits and pieces of the doctors talking about his brain, that he had serious memory problems, but no one ever asked him to try healing it.

Chronos didn't recognize him, but he was furious to see Ace bring in a child. He yelled and snarled at Ace, and Tommy ignored how Ace's hands shook as he gently pushed Tommy forward, towards the screaming hero. Tommy's heart was pounding when he put a hand on top of his head, but he immediately felt what was wrong, the parts of his brain that were damaged, and Tommy *fixed* it.

It was an immediate change. Chronos- *Karl* - almost went limp before looking at Ace and calling him *Quackity*. He apologized, over and over, and Ace broke into sobs as he set Karl free and clung to him.

Tommy stepped into the hall to give them privacy, holding a bundle of daisies. A man made of slime taught him how to turn them into a flower crown while he waited.

He was exhausted when Quackity stepped out of the room, Karl on his arm, and he gently sent Karl away before leading Tommy to the most luxurious room he'd ever seen.

Tommy was a *valuable asset*, he realized. So valuable that Quackity gave him food he never could have dreamed of eating, so valuable he could just ask for something and he'd have it in his hands within an hour, so valuable that Quackity thought it was a shame when he decided to go.

Charlie gave him a ride to the edge of the woods the Syndicate lived in, and Tommy very slowly made his way to the house. There were a bunch of strange traps on the way, but none so fatal he couldn't heal them before he bled out, so even when it hurt like *hell* he kept trudging forward, because he had to see this through. He had to meet his monsters.

Except they weren't monsters.

Sure, they looked it at first. Even without his mask, the Blade looked like a monster, huge and bulking, more piglin than human, but he also had long, pretty pink hair that he clearly took good care of. The Angel of Death could torture someone to death with a touch, but he also had beautiful wings that Tommy wanted nothing more than to touch.

Plus, the Angel read manga and the Blade was a mythology nerd. Not that intimidating.

Tommy pushed a lot when he met them. Never too far- he never knew what Dream's limits truly were, but years of trying to read him made him good at reading other people. When Phil's sighs turned from amused to annoyed, he knew to shut the fuck up. When Blade got a bit too fidgety at Tommy's chattering, he knew to *shut the fuck up*.

But they never actually lashed out. They didn't know how valuable he was, but they still treated him like a real business partner, like they had *some* sort of respect for him. Even Blade made sure he was *eating*. It was incredible. He actually made a good choice coming here.

And then he met Wilbur.

Dream had made Tommy look into the Syndicate with him a few times. There hadn't been much to look at, but when he found Wilbur Soot's trail, Dream had been *so angry*. Even though it took so much digging to find, he still felt like Tommy should have *known* that his vinyls were by a supervillain.

He didn't really care, because the music was so incredible, and now he was supposed to work for him, so what did it matter anyway?

And Wilbur liked *him*. At least, he said he did, he said he wanted to *keep* him- which already set off alarm bells in his brain- but it was so much worse when he joked about Tommy being his *brother*.

He liked the Syndicate, but if Wilbur said that again he was going to kill them all, even if he died in the process.

Blade and Phil were good, but Wilbur, the guy he *admired*, was already treating him like a thing before he even revealed he was the healer. He even went through Tommy's things, like he had the *right*, and Tommy was so terrified when he found Wilbur holding the stuffed animal he stole from an arcade in Las Nevadas, the one he named *Henry*- but Wilbur just gave it back. Dream would never just give something back.

Dream was on TV that night, begging for him to come home. He wanted to listen. He wanted to *die* rather than go back. He wanted to pretend that Dream actually wanted him, instead of just wanting his powers-

Or probably just that fucking book.

When the Syndicate used him as bait, dangling him in front of Dream like a worm, Tommy almost cracked. Because Dream was being *nice*, he was worried about Tommy, he-

"Gods, I thought you were *stolen*, Theo."

Oh, right. Tommy's just an asset.

It was even more obvious when Dream threatened to kill him, then when he threw Tommy in front of him like a human shield- Dream didn't give a *shit* about him. He never did.

He didn't need a brother. He just needed Dream *dead*.

Blade gave that to him, and Tommy healed Wilbur in return. His heart was pounding the whole trip home. Not because Dream was dead- though he was, Tommy *watched* his head roll away from his body- but because they *knew*.

They knew he was a healer, and he belonged to them. They wouldn't have to play nice with him because he was a business partner anymore, so what would change?

To the Blade, very little. He made it clear Tommy wasn't family to them, and Tommy was so *relieved*. He wasn't an object, he wasn't a best friend, he was just an employee.

And then he was pulled into their *nest*.

Tommy had been hesitant, but Blade had gestured for him to join, and he reluctantly sat down next to Wilbur. He felt weirdly conflicted. On one, reasonable hand, he was just sitting in a pile of blankets with a bunch of supervillains that just killed *Dream*.

On the other, *unreasonable* hand, he felt cozy and safe cuddled up in the nest. It was almost embarrassing how much he enjoyed it, and how quickly that sense of safety made him drop off to sleep.

When he woke up in Wilbur's arms, he swore he wouldn't do that again- it was too weird, he didn't *like* feeling so... unwillingly secure. Whatever that means. When he woke up there *again*, after being basically *mind controlled*, he just wanted to fucking die.

Wilbur's power felt so nauseatingly familiar, but he couldn't even *be* nauseous, because he was forced to just be quiet and calm. Just like he'd been forced to be quiet and asleep for *so*

long. Well, he wasn't going to be quiet anymore, he'd fucking *scream* and *fight* and *Wither* any motherfucker stupid enough to try to use their powers on him.

But Wilbur left him alone. Phil kept trying to get him back to the nest, without his flower crown, but when he refused, Phil let him be. The Blade... he was the best among them, because he was straightforward. He was honest. He wouldn't pretend that Tommy was special to him, he wouldn't try to manipulate him into being their doll of a healer, Tommy could *trust* him.

All the more so when Techno really started taking him seriously. When he let Tommy join him in torturing Gogy- and then *more*, traitors to the Syndicate, thieves that stole from them, rival gangs who hurt their people. Techno let him do whatever he wanted, and it was so *freeing*, in the weirdest way, because hurting people probably shouldn't be like that. It shouldn't be *fun*, probably, to tell a monster how to hurt someone just to patch them up and do it again.

But it was. It actually calmed him down, *genuinely*, enough that he was finally willing to hear the dickhead out. He wasn't sure what he expected- a manipulative apology? He got that. An explanation of his powers? He didn't expect that one, but he got it anyway, and *god*, how embarrassing to know Wilbur could always see how scared he is- how *relieving* to know that Wilbur only gave a shit because he couldn't help but feel what Tommy felt. It wasn't deliberate manipulation, it was just him wanting Tommy to *stop*.

Tommy wished it would stop too, but his feelings don't really ask him before they happen.

He didn't expect his tragic backstory, either. But it was... he understood, kind of, why Wilbur was so fucked up. Tommy always dreamed of flying, the fact that Wilbur gave it up for someone only for them to die right away was so *fucked up*, Tommy would probably become a mass murderer too. Let alone the whole dead mom thing.

The whole thing gave him an idea. An idea he was working so hard on, that he almost passed out for multiple times when he was working with Techno, that he was going to try on the *holiday*-

But he chickened out. He was scared of it going wrong, so he gave Wilbur his shitty backup gift, some bookmarks he made out of the flowers he had from healing Wilbur. Somehow, Wilbur still liked it, which was dumb, he didn't even know what he was missing out on-

Tommy had been nervous about giving gifts at all. He didn't know them well. They didn't know him, either, but it was nice to get gifts for the holidays for the literal first time in his life- not that he told them that. He was still awkward as he passed out his own, but Wilbur almost cried over *bookmarks*, Fundy wouldn't let go of the plushie, Phil immediately took advantage of the perfect nesting material Tommy took ages picking out-

And Techno lost his fucking shit over the crown.

The shine of the diamonds caught Tommy's eyes the moment he saw them, and he wanted *so badly* to take it for himself. The crown was so shiny, so *pretty*, he'd never wanted anything in his life more than he wanted that fucking crown. But Dream had mostly beaten sticky fingers

out of him, and he was *gift shopping*, so he tried to pull himself away from it, but... Wilbur said Techno liked jewelry. He had a different crown that was part of his costume. Maybe he'd like it, too, maybe it'd be a *great* gift and Techno would pat his head or something, and then- and then- he didn't know what. But he wanted to get him something *good*, and there was nothing better than this.

Techno agreed. He put it straight into his hoard, something Tommy didn't understand logically but *completely* understood on a personal level. Hybrid instincts forcing you to have a collection of items where you'll kill someone if they take it from you? Weird. If anyone takes any of Tommy's collection of beloved items? He would kill them and use Dream's stupid book to bring them back and do it again.

And then he *came back*. With a *new shiny*. Or rather, a bracelet, one made of gold and emeralds- not something you can find in any store, since it's been a symbol of the Syndicate for decades at least. It had to be specially ordered or something, but Techno gave it to him *anyway*, and it was suddenly the most important thing Tommy currently owned, even more important than his plush Henry- and then he got a *cow* that looked just like the original Henry on top of that? Nothing would ever be better than that day.

And nothing would ever be worse, because after a horrible nightmare, Dream breaking his bones one by one and *reminding* him that Tommy didn't deserve the Syndicate's kindness, that he didn't deserve jewelry or trinkets or the nest or *anything*, he didn't deserve food and water, he didn't deserve to be-

He woke up. He went to get water. He got lied to.

They say they *like* him? That they care about *him*, that they want *him* to live forever just to stay with them? It's the biggest bullshit he's ever heard, but even *Techno* lies straight to his face, and he just wants to scream and run away and curl up into a ball all at once, but everyone's so freaked out and *he's* so freaked out and Phil chirps and-

He chirps back.

It's just one of the stupid noises he made when he was a kid. It didn't mean anything back then, it was just weird, like how his friend headbutted everything with his horns, or how one of the older foster girls they lived with always hummed while she tended the farmer's plants. It was a *habit*, or just a weird trait, but it didn't mean anything, and he made himself stop when everyone around him got annoyed with it.

But everyone's looking at him like he did something wrong- and he *did*, he was supposed to stop doing things like that, and it's probably fucked up to chirp at an avian anyway, it's probably a hate crime or something and they hate him, they really do, because otherwise they wouldn't *lie* to him, and now they can't hide it because he's a fuck up-

He doesn't even realize when he starts running.

tommy time.

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

warning: short mention of suicide (skip the paragraph after "there wouldn't even be an end date to look forward to?"

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy only realizes he's moved when he's fumbling with the front door, struggling to unlock and open it. There are so many footsteps behind him and he's panicking, but he manages to throw it open and step outside-

Just as strong arms wrap around him, keeping him from running. He screeches and digs his nails into the arms, but they don't even flinch, pulling him back inside. "No, let go, fucking *let go!*"

"Lock the door," Techno tells one of the others, his voice gruffer than usual, and he holds Tommy tighter as he thrashes more. He starts walking back, further into the house, completely ignoring Tommy's desperate attempts to escape.

He freezes a little when he realizes they're heading towards Techno's so-called *den*, the place Techno's never let him in willingly. It's also the place he stores all his knives and-

Phil makes another bird noise from behind them, one of the calming ones he used when Wilbur was Withered, that seems to mean something like 'you're safe, I have you'. "Techno, take him to the nest instead, okay?"

Techno huffs. "I need-"

"I know, but you heard him. *He* needs the nest."

"I- I don't need *shit*, bitch," Tommy says, heart pounding. He's still frozen in place, no longer fighting Techno's grasp because it's *pointless*, maybe if he just stays very very still and is very very good he'll get another chance to run-

Techno redirects their path, carrying him to the nest, while the others all hover around them, probably ready to grab him if he manages to get away.

He's still tensed up when Techno drops him in the nest, surprisingly gentle. The nest is cozy, but it doesn't feel *safe*, not anymore, not with all of them just *looking* at him-

"Tommy," Phil murmurs as he kneels down next to the nest. "Why didn't you tell us you were an avian?" He's *grinning*, like Tommy didn't just try to *run* from the *Syndicate*-

Wait. What did he just say?

Wilbur's in just as good a mood as he flops down in the nest, near but not in arm's reach of Tommy. "Oh, this would have been *so* much easier if we knew earlier."

"Clay never mentioned that Tommy was an *avian*, " Fundy says curiously from the doorway.

"That's probably why he's nervous all the time, and why he likes Techno best!" Wilbur exclaims. "He feels like he's in another avian's territory-"

"Or he just actually likes me the most," Techno huffs, hovering over the nest.

"He'll like me and Phil more when his instincts accept that he's *flock*-"

Something about that makes Tommy snap out of being frozen. "What are you *fucking* talking about? I'm not an avian!" He's extremely uncomfortable and overwhelmingly scared, but he needs answers.

The room goes quiet, which is the exact opposite of getting answers. "Tommy," Phil says a little unsurely. "It's a little late to say that, mate. Pretty clear you're an avian."

"...okay, but consider this," Tommy says, clapping his hands together. "I'm not?"

"Mate, you *chirped*-"

Part of him thinks he should let them believe that, so they won't get mad at him, but also how angry would they be to find out later? They seem... excited about it, but he's *not* a bird like them. "It was a dumb fucking- I just make weird noises sometimes! That doesn't mean I'm a hybrid."

Phil sighs. "You're not going to convince us. Human throats *can't* chirp like that."

Tommy... can't really process that. He just stares at Phil blankly. "What?"

That just makes him look *concerned* . "Tommy, do you... do you not *know*?"

Before he can answer- another denial, because there's no *way* he's an avian- Wilbur interrupts. "How could he not know? He's sixteen! He should have started making a nest at thirteen at the *latest* , that's not something you can just brush off-"

"Trauma can stifle instincts," Phil murmurs, clearly worried. "If he grew up with enough stress, it could have pushed it off until he felt safe-"

Wilbur groans, leaning back further into the blankets. "And he never feels safe..."

Tommy bristles. "Can you *fucking bitches* not talk about me like I'm not right the fuck here? I'm *telling* you, I'm not an avian! Hey, riddle me this, dickhead, if I'm supposed to be an avian, where are my goddamn wings, huh?" Checkmate.

Wilbur just rolls his eyes. “Tommy, remember when I talked to you about hybrid genetics? If you had a human parent- especially if your avian parent *also* had a human parent- you’re not going to have as many traits as people who are *mostly* avian. Hell, *most* avians don’t have wings anymore! It’s usually just the vocal cords, or sometimes talons.”

...so... maybe it wasn’t checkmate. But it’s still not *true*. There’s no way Tommy’s gone his whole life being part bird without realizing it *once*. “Still, I’m *not*-”

Phil chirps at him again, something like he’s trying to comfort him. Tommy has to stifle a chirp of his own, an automatic reaction, and Phil frowns, doing it again but *worried*, like he’s saying ‘you’re safe, what’s wrong?’ And- *everything’s* wrong, he hasn’t *forgotten* that they’re all pretending to want him, like they actually *care* about him-

He *warbles*, a sad sound he hasn’t made in a *long* time, so long he barely remembers ever making it, and Phil’s face crumples like Tommy told him he just killed his cat or something. “Oh, Tommy...”

“Uh, translation for the non-birds in the room?” Techno asks.

Tommy grits his teeth. “*No*,” he says before Phil or Wilbur can answer him. “There’s no translation because it’s not- I didn’t mean to do that! Fuck off!”

“Do we- do we leave them alone, or...?” Fundy whispers to Techno, a little too loud.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he answers firmly, and Tommy sinks further into blankets underneath him. He wants to be left alone in the nest- no, he wants to *leave*, he wants to fucking run.

He needs to get away from them. He thought it was fine, that they’d keep treating him like an employee, but they want to make him immortal just to *keep* him. It only took Dream a few years to completely drop the *nice big brother* facade. How long would the Syndicate take? And how the fuck would he get away from them if *he* was immortal, so there wouldn’t even be an *end date* to look forward to?

Well, he could always kill himself. He doesn’t know if he could go through with it, though. Or if his powers would even let him- he’d probably just panic and heal on instinct.

Phil and Wilbur are talking but he isn’t listening- he doesn’t even know if they’re talking to *him* or each other. Tommy’s just sitting here, feeling distant and tired, too tired to try to run again right now. Maybe tomorrow, they’ll leave him alone a little and he can try again. Maybe-

“-take shifts,” Phil murmurs when Tommy tunes back in. It seems like they realized he wasn’t paying attention. “I’ll do most of them, he’ll need me around to help guide him through his instincts.”

“I can help too,” Wilbur complains.

“No, you can’t,” Techno grunts. “He doesn’t like you, he’ll start freakin’ out again if we leave him with you.”

“He *likes* me! He-“

“Your powers remind him of 404 knockin’ him out, *and* you’re the one who made him panic over the idea of us likin’ him.”

Tommy hates them all, but *especially* Techno. He told him about what George did to him in *confidence*, and he’s just talking about it like it’s *nothing*- and how the fuck can he pretend it’s all Wilbur’s doing when *he’s* the one who broke his promise? Or- kind of broke it, since he said Tommy wasn’t going to be family but they’re all *pretending* he’ll be family. Fuck, he’s confused. He’s *tired*.

He curls up and watches them blankly as Phil shoos the others out of the room, despite Wilbur’s whining and Techno’s repeated refusals. Fundy just gives Tommy a concerned look before leaving with them- it gives him a *little* hope. Wilbur said something about how he was afraid to scare Fundy off, which means Fundy *can* be scared off, which means... maybe Tommy can get his help. Maybe.

Phil sighs and kneels in front of the nest again. “This is all pretty overwhelming for you, isn’t it?”

Tommy’s tired, but not enough that he isn’t pissed at the condescension. “Fuck you,” he says, lacking the energy he wants to put behind it.

It gets a small smile out of Phil, though. “I know, I know. It’s a lot all at once, and you can’t let yourself believe any of it. But you *are* an avian, we *do* care about you, and our offer of eternity is genuine. You can-“

“I don’t want it,” Tommy snaps, curling up further. “I won’t become immortal just for- just for you *fucks* to use my healing for all of fucking time.”

Phil’s expression doesn’t change, and for a moment Tommy feels a weird mix of hurt, disappointed, and *victorious*. If Phil actually gave a shit, he’d be upset at Tommy turning down his so-called offer, but he doesn’t care-

“That’s fine, Tommy. But you’re always free to change your mind, okay? It’s never too late. Wilbur might be a *little* disappointed if you get older than him, but at least Fundy could stop fretting about his future uncle being younger than him,” he chuckles, and Tommy’s heart *stops*.

They’re fucking immortal. They work on a different fucking *timeline*- they can wait him out for his whole fucking lifespan, and it’s nothing compared to how long Phil has been alive. If they want his powers, it doesn’t matter if he’s sixteen or ninety-six. *They can wait*.

Tommy can’t hold out forever. Especially not if they’re *maybe* right about the bird thing, because they have to be fucking *experts* at manipulating bird instincts, and he’s read the

short, lacking avian section in his book, but just those few paragraphs mentioned *imprinting* and how much it can fuck someone up-

He's fucked. He's so fucked. Despite himself, he starts to tear up, and Phil coos at him, *don't be sad I'm here you're safe*. It's just another fucking lie.

He hides his head in his knees, the weakest way to hide his tears, and he shudders when Phil runs a hand through his hair. He can't pretend that it's Phil being *nice*, he can't let himself think that even for a moment, because even if he's fucked he has to last as long as he can. He can't cave into their kindness, he can't accept their lies- he has to *rebel*, the way he never could with Dream, because if he doesn't he'll never fucking forgive himself.

Not for all of eternity.

Chapter End Notes

my boy is having a rough time. it may get rougher.

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's been two days, and Tommy doesn't know what's going on.

He kind of assumed something would have *happened* by now. Phil was so ominous, and Wilbur was so pushy, and Techno was so *pissy*- but Tommy's just been sitting here. In the nest. For two days.

They won't let him leave. There's a bathroom attached to the nest, and they deliver meals and snacks fucking *constantly*, but he hasn't gotten more than a glimpse of the hallway since Techno first dropped him in here. Tommy hasn't tried to escape yet, though he's thought about it- but there's no windows in here or in the bathroom, and Techno is the one who keeps delivering meals and Tommy knows *damn well* he can't get past him, and-

And he doesn't want to leave the nest.

It's fucking *creepy* how much he doesn't want to leave the nest, actually. Most of him knows he should, knows he should try to shove his way past Techno and run as far as he can, out of the house, out of the forest, out of the *country* if he can... but then he tries to get out of the nest and he gets overwhelmed by how much fucking *danger* he's in.

He's watched firsthand as Techno cut through flesh, looking *bored* as his victim of choice would scream. Sometimes he'd talk with Tommy over it, telling him some old myth or listing off whatever they had to do before they went hom- back to the house. And yeah, Tommy didn't care at the time, because he had *power*. Techno gave him power like he'd never had before, because he'd look at Tommy and say 'how do you want to do this' and-

Tommy could choose. He had options.

So he got to pick how people suffered, but Techno *did* it, and when Tommy stands up from the nest and takes a few steps his brain just screams at him, asking who gets to pick how *he* would suffer if he pissed them off enough. Who would tell Techno how to make him hurt?

Would he decide himself?

And that's just Techno. Tommy used to watch fights on TV while he waited for Dream to come home, and the cameras would cut off when things got *too* dicey, but he knows how competent the other two are, too. He's waited at Dream's door to heal *shattered* bones, to sew together gashes so deep you can see the organs underneath, to reattach a tongue that's been cut out. Tommy can heal himself, yeah, but that wouldn't stop him from hurting in the first place.

But the nest is *safe*. No one will hurt him in the nest. Phil wouldn't want blood in his nest, Tommy convinces himself, so he's fine as long as he's *here* and *alone*.

There's a knock on the door- just a warning, not asking for *permission*- and Tommy screams into a pillow out of frustration. "Hey, Tommy," Phil says, having the balls to sound concerned. "I'm coming in, alright?"

Tommy doesn't give him an answer. Fuck that guy, actually.

Phil, of course, enters the room. Tommy refuses to even look at him. "Hi, mate," he keeps his voice quiet and calm, like Tommy is some fucking *feral animal* he's trying to get to warm up to him. Well, he better watch out, because Tommy will fucking bite him. Except not, because that fear is back, only somewhat tempered by the safety of the nest. "How are you feeling?"

"Fuck you, eat shit," he mutters into the pillow. He's tired. Not just regular tired- though he hasn't slept in two days, and he's been healing himself but that just keeps his brain from shutting down, it doesn't stop him from being *stupidly* exhausted- but the kind of tired he always was at Dream's. *Hopeless* tired, where the spite that's been keeping him going starts to waver.

"That's not an answer," Phil gently scolds him.

"...I've been locked in a room for two fucking days, *Angel*. I'm not doing fucking *great*," he says through gritted teeth, trying not to be so aggressive that Phil will run out of patience but *not* so complacent that Phil thinks any of the shit he's done is *okay*.

Phil coos, *it's okay it's safe*-

"And cut that shit *out*." It's not okay, he's not *safe*, so if Phil could give him the fucking courtesy of not lying to him. Fuck, it's so weird now that he's realized he *knows* what Phil's bird noises mean. Before he just assumed he was *guessing*, like yeah of course Phil is trying to comfort Wilbur when he's hurt, of course the upset chirp is something like 'what's wrong'. But it was never a guess, he just *knew*.

"You should get used to hearing it, mate. When you feel better, you'll start making them more, too."

"I'm not going to," he hisses, just to be contrary. *Fuck* Phil.

That just gets a quiet laugh out of Phil, like he was joking, and Tommy finally lifts his head to glare at him. He just looks pleased that Tommy's not hiding his face anymore. *Fuck*. "Hi there." Tommy huffs, and Phil smiles more. "Feeling cooped up?"

He is. But he doesn't want to admit that, he doesn't want to give Phil *anything* that could be used against him, even something so obvious and so small that he won't be able to use it-

"Do you want to go to your room?"

Oh fuck, he can use it.

Tommy's surprised at the offer, but then he takes a minute to actually think it over. That means leaving the safety of the nest- but that was always flimsy at best, just his head trying to convince him it was safe, the way he used to think Dream's couch was safe. It also means

he'd be back in *his* room, which he barely got to use before all of this shit. Plus, unless they've emptied it out- which they probably have, but *maybe* not- he's got his knife from Techno in there. And his holiday knife from Wilbur.

And most importantly, *Henry*.

"Yeah," he mumbles, and Phil beams like it was a quiz and he just gave the right answer. Tommy glances around and collects the few poppies he grew from healing his exhaustion, holding onto them tightly before standing up.

Maybe this is his chance to run, actually. If they're letting him go between rooms, maybe he can just... bolt. He'll come back for Henry, maybe- or maybe he can ask Quackity for help getting him back- or he can sell them out to...

No. He's not going to sell them out just because he's mad they're pretending to care about him. He can at least be *grateful* for what they've done for him so far-

Why does that sound like something Dream would say? Fuck.

He blinks when a hand waves in front of his face. "Get a little stuck in your thoughts, fledgling?" Phil murmurs. "It's okay. I know it's hard to leave the nest. I promise you'll be happy in your room, too."

"It's not hard to leave the nest," Tommy lies. "It's fine, let's fucking go."

It's actually hard to leave the nest. After days of lying in it, feeling safe, it's a little terrifying to step out of the room.

He felt like that after he left Dream's apartment, too. Tommy walked out and suddenly he had the sun on his face, and the freedom to go wherever he wanted, and it was overwhelming. He missed the couch, the familiar rooms of the apartment, the lack of wind and even the filtered air that he exclusively breathed because their windows didn't open. The world was so *much*, and he was so small in comparison. At some point, it was only the distance he had traveled that stopped him from running back and begging Dream for forgiveness. He just wanted to be somewhere *familiar*.

Agoraphobia, Charlie had said in a far too cheery voice for their discussion. Tommy denied it immediately, because he was a *business partner*; he wasn't supposed to show fear, but... well, it wasn't wrong.

He thought he got over it. Las Nevadas was so big and beautiful, and he ran around exploring it whenever Quackity was too busy reconciling with his fiancé, and eventually the fear receded, replaced by curiosity and determination. He *would* meet the Syndicate, he'd *never* see Dream again, he'd be *free* -

Don't be sad I'm here you're safe, a voice sings, and he jolts, brought back into awareness again.

They're in the hall, Phil's hand on his shoulder. The world is blurry- oh, no. That's just his eyes being wet. If he was going to cry, he wishes it could have waited until Phil left him alone again.

The song trails off, turning to words. "-it's okay, fledgling, I'm right here, just a few more steps down the hall, alright? Your room is *just* as safe as the nest, I promise," Phil says as he guides him to his room. Tommy tries to think of something to say, some way to snap at him, but his mind feels so *slow*. He's tired, he's distracted, he's upset, and Phil's already opening the door-

Tommy stops in the doorway and blinks.

His room is mostly how he left it. His holiday gifts are all on the ugly bubblegum pink desk he demanded Phil buy for him, even when Phil offered to buy him something way more expensive, even when Techno offered to *build* him a better desk. Dirty clothes lay on the floor next to the hamper- after Techno took him shopping one day after he got some 'traitor to the Syndicate' blood on one of his shirts, he had more than enough clothes to just toss them on the floor rather than clean them constantly. Even his joke of a medical book is still half-tucked under his pillow, where he left it before he fell asleep and had his nightmare.

But also on the bed are lots and lots of *blankets*.

They're not even familiar. He's seen the linen closet, it's got a ton of spare blankets and sheets, but these all look brand new and freshly washed and they're all over his stupidly big bed, which is fine but- why?

Phil's hand falls from his shoulder and Tommy steps forward, immediately sitting on the edge of the bed. There's so much here, from silk sheets to fluffy comforters, but they're also just thrown around randomly? Kind of like... the nest?

But worse, because they're all in the wrong place. He starts rearranging them, using the thickest ones as a base and then piling the thinner ones or the ones that feel best closer to the top. Some part of him whispers that it's *weird*, that he should be more concerned about why they're here or why Phil brought him to his room in the first place, but he's tired and he just wants to *fix* this.

It takes a surprisingly short time to fix. He has to adjust it a few extra times, when he sits in it and realizes something is a little off, but finally he settles in and it's *perfect*. Even better than Phil's nest, actually, Tommy is the fucking *king* of making nests and every bird ever can kiss his ass-

Did he just make a fucking nest.

"There you go," Phil says fondly. He sounds almost *proud* of him, and fuck, has he really just been standing in the doorway watching him the whole time? Tommy fucking forgot he was there. "It's better when it's *your* nest, isn't it?"

"What the fuck," he says, his throat feeling dry. "What the fuck?"

“Nesting is an avian instinct,” he explains, still far too pleased. “You liked my nest, but it’s better here, isn’t it? That’s because your instincts consider this *your* territory. You don’t have to be worried about being in someone else’s now.”

That’s the stupidest shit he’s ever heard and it explains *so* much. Tommy sinks further into the blankets. “Why the fuck.”

Phil shrugs. “Birds can be territorial little fucks. There’s still some crows that are bitter I moved into their section of the forest. The shits love Techno, though, he keeps giving them bits of potato. But when *I* try to feed them, no, they’ll divebomb the fuck out of me.”

“No, why the *fuck* did you- give me these?” He tugs on one of the blankets, and then immediately smooths it back into place.

He cocks his head, as if he doesn’t know why Tommy is confused. “Mate... first and foremost, we need to unstunt your instincts. They aren’t going to let you give a bunch of predators and rival avians a *chance* until you can understand them-”

Tommy bristles. “I’m not *not giving you a chance* because I’m- fucking- *maybe* part bird-”

“Oh, Tommy, we are *very* past you being ‘*maybe*’ an avian-”

“Shut the fuck up- I’m not ‘giving you a chance’ because it’s *bullshit* and I’m not going to let myself get fucking- fucking *tricked* just because you bitches want to- want to keep me *trapped* for literally forever-”

I’m here I’m here, Phil coos when Tommy gets choked up, which *doesn’t help*, he doesn’t want Phil to be here! “Fledgling, it’s not like that. We’ll prove it to you, a thousand times over, as many times as you need. But right now you need to *rest*. Look, we added a lock to your door so you can lock us out when you need to feel safe, so you can shut that behind me and get some real sleep, alright?”

Tommy’s eyes dart towards the door- there *is* a lock there. One that locks from the inside. Is Phil serious? He really just... gave Tommy a way to shut them out?

Dream removed Tommy’s bedroom door when he was, what, thirteen? He’d been upset over something stupid, something Dream said he told him to do but he didn’t remember Dream telling him but Dream *insisted* he had - and Tommy slammed the door shut and Dream fucking *took it off it’s hinges*. He slept on the couch more often after that, because if he couldn’t even get the privacy of a door, then why bother?

But now he gets a *lock*. And... a nest of his own. Phil’s right, it *is* much better when it’s his, it feels safer, and he really is tired. He’ll need to rest if he wants to try to leave... or if he wants to try to convince them that he won’t play along and they should just go back to treating him like an employee.

Tommy yawns. “Yeah. Fine. Get out.”

Phil ducks back into the hall, and Tommy gets to his feet, returning to the door to shut and lock it. He refuses to look Phil in the face as he does so, but Phil speaks up right as his hand grasps the doorknob. "Feel better, fledgling. We'll be waiting for you."

Tommy slams the door in his face.

Chapter End Notes

on one hand tommy is getting "lied to" by a bunch of villains who want to use his powers for eternity and are "faking that they care about him" to do it. on the other hand he gets a bunch of nice blankets. which side of him will win

note: i will be going on a 1-2 week hiatus (back by the 30th at the latest)! as some people have mentioned in the comments, i've been neglecting alien boy AND i've been churning out these chapters at a rate i won't be able to keep up with forever, so i'll be easing back on IAHB slightly to try to get a chapter or two out of AB and also to work on a few new dsmp ideas that have caught my interest.

if anyone in the comments is rude about me taking a short break, i'm just going to delete their comments. sorry, that will just make me want to put off writing and i don't need that.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Tommy wakes, throat dry and stomach aching from hunger, it's to a knock at his door. He's disoriented from sleeping so long, but not so disoriented he doesn't know something's *weird* about that-

He doesn't have a door. Wait, no, he's not at Dream's. He's *long* out of Dream's- but he doesn't have a door, he's on the couch- no, he has a room, he has a-

He's in his *nest*. Tommy's cozy and safe in his nest and does a knock on the door even matter anymore? He's still tired, he could just close his eyes again and sink right back into sleep, keep catching up on his multiple-day sleep deficit. The only thing that could keep him awake is his hunger, which is easily fixed. Flowers grow and drop from his open palm as the ache recedes, and he settles back in-

Another knock, louder this time. Can't they just come in? Why does he have to answer? He grumbles quietly, but sits up, easing his way off the bed. His legs are almost numb- he must have been sleeping weirdly- but he braces himself on the edge of the bed until he can take a few fumbling steps over to the door.

It's... locked?

Oh. He locked it, didn't he? They gave him a *lock*. He doesn't have to open the door, he thinks. He can just leave it locked, Phil said so. But then again, if he abuses it, they could just take it away, and he doesn't have a reason to keep it locked right now, other than he wants to be left alone. That's probably not good enough.

"Theseus," Techno says from the other side of the door. "I can hear you standin' there."

It's not good enough. He twists the lock and opens it.

Techno is standing there, holding a tray of food. Despite healing his hunger pains, his empty stomach still growls at even the thought of eating, let alone the *smell*. He could eat a fucking horse if it wouldn't hurt his stomach.

Techno steps forward, and Tommy steps back, out of the way, for him to come in. He doesn't *want* Techno to come in, he doesn't want him in the room, near his *nest*, but Techno won't leave until he watches Tommy eat, probably.

He's been weird since Tommy tried to run. Phil's been overprotective, yeah, and Wilbur and Fundy have both been kept away, but Techno just.... shows up and stares at him. Like he'll disappear if Techno looks away. Like Techno would *give a shit* if he disappeared.

He's also barely said a word any time he's been by. Even now, he just grunts as he shoves the tray towards Tommy. Tommy takes it, immediately dropping it on his desk- too hard, as it rattles and something falls off of it, onto the floor. Tommy flinches at the clatter, Dream would be so angry if he was here-

He's dead. Get over it, Tommy.

Tommy squats down to scoop up whatever he dropped, but stops. "Blade."

"....hm." It's some sort of acknowledgement, which is good enough for Tommy.

"Why did you bring me a necklace?"

Tommy hasn't taken off the bracelet Techno gave him. He should, he knows- he doesn't know what the fuck Wilbur was talking about when he brought it up, when he said something about a 'sunder gift' and that it wasn't something Techno just gave out- but he hasn't. Because he likes it. Because it's *his*, Techno gave it to him, Tommy basically paid for it with the crown he gave him. He doesn't want to take it off.

But now Techno- because it's definitely Techno, he's the one with the gold *hoard* rather than the few random pieces the others have- is giving him a necklace. It's gold, of fucking course, the chain thin and delicate, with a small, pink gem as the centerpiece. He doesn't know what kind of gem it is, but it's the exact same shade as-

"Why did you bring me a necklace that's the same color as your *hair*?"

Techno stares him down for a long moment, but Tommy doesn't look away, even when Techno answers. "It's for you."

"...what, you want to *bribe* me? For what?"

"It's not a bribe. It's a gift." His sentences are short, cut off sharply, like he's not saying what he wants to. It annoys Tommy, and he glares down at the necklace like it's the jewelry's fault. "You don't like it." It doesn't quite sound like a question, but Tommy's pretty sure it's supposed to be one.

"It's fucking *sus*, Blade-"

"Techno," he interrupts, and Tommy glares up at him. "...don't just... go back to callin' me Blade."

Tommy huffs, but he's trying *not* to be in danger, he's trying- he's-

He needs a real goal at some point. Something concrete. Right now it's just to not piss off Techno *too* much. "Fine," he hisses. "Why are you giving me a *gift*, Techno? I already kept the bracelet-"

"You need more," Techno says, a little too fast, and he steps closer. "You-" he stops himself, almost frozen in place, and then moves backwards again. What is *wrong* with him?

“....are you on drugs?”

“What?”

“You on drugs, big man? I won’t tell Phil, promise, but if you’re losing it I kinda want to know before you fucking... hallucinate that I’m a hero or something and snap me in half.”

“...no, I’m not on drugs,” Techno says, almost a growl. It makes Tommy tense up, and Techno makes a weird huffing noise Tommy’s heard before. When was that...?

“Then what the fuck is your deal?”

“My *deal*, Theseus, is-“ He huffs again. “My deal is that I’ve been successfully controllin’ my instincts for *decades* and you’ve managed to screw that up in a matter of weeks.”

Tommy freezes in place. Oh, he’s *fucked up*.

He doesn’t know much about piglin instincts. His book is incredibly lacking on anything but the physical traits of the hybrids it goes over, but... this has to be *bad*. Tommy didn’t mean to screw anything up, but he *did*, and Techno’s pissed about it.

No wonder he went along with everyone’s lying.

“I... didn’t mean to,” he says, knowing it’s a poor apology, one that Dream would never accept. “I mean, I didn’t know-“

“I know you didn’t know. I’m-” Techno lets out a deep breath. “I’m not mad. I’m just... strugglin’ with it right now.”

...well, he’s definitely mad, but maybe not too much? So... can he ask about it? He’ll try, he decides after a moment. “What... does that have to do with the necklace?”

Techno groans, and Tommy stumbles back a little, towards the nest. Techno immediately lets out those weird huffs again- *fuck*, when did he hear them before? It means something, the same way Phil’s chirps do, he thinks, but Tommy doesn’t *know* that the same way he knows avian stuff. Is it angry, maybe? He doesn’t like that Tommy is pulling away from him?

He stays still as Techno approaches, wanting him to stay away but *also* wanting those noises to stop. They don’t, but they sound less... aggressive, up close. Quieter, calmer. Or maybe he’s making shit up. Pretending it’s what he wants it to be.

Techno reaches out, carefully taking Tommy’s hand and opening it up. Tommy lets him, wanting him to get whatever he’s doing over with so he’ll walk away again. Techno takes the necklace- part of Tommy is *so angry*, that’s *his* shiny, Techno *gave* it to him he can’t have it back- and then takes Tommy by the shoulder and turns him around.

Tommy’s obedient, letting himself be pushed around. Techno took the necklace. He doesn’t want to have to give up the bracelet, too, so he’ll just... be good. And maybe he’ll get it back-

Techno is putting it on him.

Oh. That makes... zero sense.

But Techno gently rests the stone over his chest, and then closes the clasp at the back. Careful hands pull Tommy back to face him, and he looks so... *satisfied*. Like he just won a fight- or no, not something so violent, but like... like he just got something he wanted.

But all he did was put a *necklace* on Tommy. So what the fuck is that about?

“What the fuck is going *on*?” Tommy whispers, and Techno *huffs*-

Wilbur suggested using him as bait and Techno pulled him close, protective, like he'd fight Wilbur for even suggesting it. Just the thought of seeing Dream up close terrified him- that was his brother, his best friend, he'd do anything for Dream, he'd go right back to him if Dream just said he wanted him instead of his powers- but he agreed and Techno let out those little huffs, trying to comfort him, letting him know he didn't have to. That he had a choice.

“Sorry,” Techno says now, between the huffs- he's trying to soothe Tommy, stop him from being so freaked out, the same way Phil chirps. “It's more instinct stuff.”

“You can't just fucking- brush shit *off* like that, what *is* it, why are you fucking-”

There's more huffs, and Tommy falls quiet, but he still wants *answers*, still stares Techno down to demand them. Techno looks back at him before sighing. “Fine. Fine. But eat somethin' first.”

Tommy doesn't break eye contact as he reaches towards the desk, grabbing a piece of toast and shoving it in his mouth.

“Yeah. Yep, that works.” Techno fidgets, an unfamiliar but not entirely new sight. He twists one of the golden rings on his fingers around and around, until he just tugs it off and holds it out. Tommy, confused, reaches out and accepts it. “Do you know... literally anythin' about piglins?”

“Nope.”

“Yeah. I figured.” Techno glances at the door, as if he'll get an excuse to escape. “...piglins are a pack species. With hybrids, your mileage may vary on how intense instincts are, but... generally, we need a sounder.”

“Sounder,” he repeats, and Techno's eyes dart back towards him. “What's a sounder?”

“Piglin pack. Kind of like a family, but... not.”

... *not* a family. Tommy squints at him. “What's a ‘sounder gift’?”

Techno lets out another groan. “*That's*... more complicated.” Tommy just waits. “So... piglins pick up strays. Not always, it's not like we *have* to, but, uh... if the sounder gets along

well enough with someone who *doesn't* have a sounder, they can just kinda... adopt them. But there's a whole ritual to it."

"That includes... sounder gifts."

"Yeah. The sounder... offers a gift. Jewelry is traditional. It's gotta be somethin' to, uh... it's supposed to remind the stray of them. So they know they're wanted, that they'll be part of the group."

Tommy glances down at his bracelet. Gold and emeralds. The symbol of the Syndicate. "So- but you- why the fuck did you-?"

"Hey, you did it first!" Techno says defensively.

"No the fuck I didn't? What?"

"The- the crown! Diamonds, blue like your eyes- it was a *perfect* sounder gift, alright, I wasn't tryin' to- I was actually tryin' to *not* get attached to you, and then you handed over the thing that overwhelmed my instincts for the first time in *decades*-"

What.

What?

Okay, okay, first of all- what? In what fucking world would diamonds remind *anyone* of Tommy? Literally ever? His eyes are blue, yeah, but not in the way the crown's diamonds are. They're so shiny, so perfect, and he's just... not that. Not even when his eyes glow.

Secondly, the fuck does he mean he was trying not to get attached to Tommy? It's not like it's hard. No one fucking *wants* Tommy, it'd be hard to *try* to get attached to him, so what the fuck is he *talking* about?

"-and then it was too late, so-"

"What do you mean, *too late*? It's not like we got fucking married, Blade, if you fucking- accidentally asked me to join your- your *sounder* or whatever-" Tommy reaches for the bracelet, about to tug it off even though he doesn't want to, even though it's *his*-

Techno's hand covers his wrist. It's not grasping, not hurting, but it's present, stopping him from tossing it away. "*Don't.*" It's a whisper, like it's physically hurting Techno. "Don't. Please." Tommy stays very, very still, and after a moment, Techno lets his hand drop. "If you- takin' it off like that is like... like tellin' me I'm a bad *Protector*. My instincts would be, uh. Bad."

"...protector," Tommy repeats. Techno lent some weird *intent* to it, like it meant something way more than the word itself.

Techno takes a breath, almost shaky. "It's, uh. A sounder protects each other. It's my role in Phil's flock, too. I'm the best at fightin', I'm the best at *protectin'*, I'll- I'll be good at protectin' you, *don't take it off.*"

Oh. Shit. He's freaking out Techno's instincts *right now*. "I... I won't, big man. It's... fine. It's fine, you're, uh, a good protector. Fucking- you stopped Dream from grabbing me, you- you helped me when George was- you're... you're good."

It's the truth. Techno's been the one taking care of him the whole time, really- uh, as much as Tommy has *been* taken care of. Which is not much, because he's a big man who takes care of himself. But Techno kept helping him- when Wilbur scared him, when Phil was getting too grabby, when Dream reached out and was going to *kill him*- Techno protected him.

Maybe... he wasn't lying. Not like the rest of them. He's just... fucked by his instincts. He can't help it, because Tommy screwed up and gave him that crown. He forced Techno to get attached to him.

...Techno cares about him. Techno wants to *protect* him. A fucked up part of Tommy *preens* at that, at him *tricking* Techno into wanting him. If it's the only way he'll ever get someone, then it has to be good enough.

"...shit," Techno curses softly. "I'll- I'll get this under control. Somehow. It's just, uh- hard to stifle now that I've... it's kind of like an addiction. Cavin' to it once makes it harder to ignore."

"Sorry," he murmurs, not sorry in the slightest. He plays with the bracelet, twisting it around his wrist, and Techno's eyes catch on it.

"...the, uh. The ring. Did you-?" Tommy blinks at the unfinished question, and then looks around- oh, he put it in his pocket on instinct. He takes it out, and when Techno doesn't reach back for it, he slips it onto his thumb, the only finger big enough for it to fit on. Techno *huffs* again, this time with a small smile.

"Why the ring? And... the necklace?"

"You're just a shoat," Techno answers without hesitation, eyes still on the ring. "And you're- you need gold. A lot of it, you need- I shouldn't have let you go so long without, even before you were sounder I should have-" He blinks, realizing what bullshit he's spouting, and takes a deep breath. "More... piglin stuff."

Tommy frowns- some of that sounded *weird*. Instinct shit is total bullshit-

Oh, fuck, he's going to go through *hell* when Phil 'unstunts his instincts' or what the fuck ever. Which he cannot think about right now or he'll lose it. "Is it really that easy to join a sounder? Just... give someone a piece of jewelry and you're in?"

Techno snorts, amused at the thought. "No. No, not even a little. I was- I should have given you the bracelet *first*. We, uh, did it backwards- traditionally, anyway. Sometimes it happens the other way around, like this, but that's usually, uh... a shoat askin' for help."

...he's gonna ignore that last part. "Then why did it set off... everything?"

Techno hesitates at that question, but Tommy just twists the ring around to keep his attention and he caves quickly. “I have a couple guesses. Most likely, uh... you were already settin’ off some of my other instincts.”

“What other instincts?”

“...I’ve been workin’ with Phil’s *flock* dynamics for centuries. It’s close, but it’s not the same. In a sounder, there’s a *Protector*, but everyone provides. In flocks, there’s one provider, and in ours, it’s him. I, uh... I make breakfast sometimes, but that’s all I get to do to provide.” Techno seems almost *sheepish*. “I didn’t think it bothered me, but... makin’ sure you eat, givin’ you a knife, teachin’ you things, it’s... I’m pretty sure that it got to me. Made me a little more open to seein’ you as sounder. Then, with Phil bein’ pushy about you bein’ *flock*-”

“Shut up,” Tommy says sharply. He doesn’t want to hear any more about that. Techno being *forced* to see him as something... something almost family, that’s one thing, that’s- that’s Tommy forcing his way into being cared for, that’s something he *understands*. But Phil fucking- acting like he cares about Tommy *legitimately*, like Tommy would actually be his family-

It’s bullshit. He doesn’t want to hear it from *Techno*.

Techno just looks at him for a long moment, like he’s looking for an explanation in his expression, but there’s nothing there because it should be *obvious*, he’s made it pretty fucking clear he doesn’t want to be lied to. “...alright. You got the point, anyway.”

“Yeah, yeah, you have more mama bird instincts than the fucking actual bird, I get it-”

“Oh, no. Not even a little. You’ve seen how overbearin’ Phil is first hand, and that’s with him *holdin’ back* so he won’t scare you-”

“It gets *worse*?”

Techno’s mouth twitches, almost a smile. “Let’s just say it’s a good thing you can heal illnesses. It’ll stop him from hoverin’ over you for *weeks* at a time. ‘Oh, Techno, mate, you had a cough a month ago you need to stay in the *nest*, you can’t leave the *nest* Techno you’re basically dyin’-”

The horrible attempt to impersonate Phil makes him laugh- actually laugh, holy shit, when did he last *laugh*? ...when he grew back a guy’s leg? God. His life needs to get less depressing immediately.

Which... maybe it will. Because Techno *cares* about him. Whether he wants to or not, because Tommy is his... not-quite-family now. And if Techno can’t even handle the idea of Tommy taking the bracelet off, then he definitely couldn’t *betray* him, right? So it’s... it’s fine. It’s safe, maybe. And if he sticks with Techno, maybe Phil will back off a little, and- he’ll be okay. He’ll be *okay*. He’ll be Techno’s sounder. And... he guesses... Techno is his flock?

He's brought out of his thoughts by a sudden strange noise, and the first thing he notices is Techno's wide eyes. What the fuck was that? He's about to look around the room to see if he can spot where it came from, but it happens again and it's-

It's from him. He chirped.

Which, okay, yeah, that's- he doesn't want to be chirping, because it's like an embarrassing habit from when he was a kid basically, but also it *isn't* because it's an avian thing that's apparently super normal and how the *fuck* did none of the adults around him ever get him checked for hybrid ancestry when he was running around chirping and *jumping off high places like he could fly*- Whatever. He doesn't want to be chirping, but he *is*, and he doesn't know why, and it's weird but he keeps letting out those little chirps and peeps and-

"Don't freak out, Theseus," Techno says, his voice quiet. "It's, uh- this is fine. Those are good chirps, I think- I should, uh, get Phil."

Tommy shoots a hand out to grab Techno's arm. He doesn't *want* Phil, even if he's supposed to be the bird expert or whatever. He wants Techno, and Techno's here so why would he be going anywhere?

"Okay. This is... normal. Yup. Just-" Techno pulls his arm free and Tommy's about to complain, but he just- holds his arms open. Like he's asking for a hug. Which... he is, actually, because when Tommy doesn't do it Techno raises an eyebrow at him and-

Oh, alright, Tommy's hugging him now. And still letting out those weird fucking *chirps*. He tries to suppress them, but it's not working, he's too... happy, maybe? Or confused. Or both. But something about Techno being his *flock* set them off and he- he doesn't know *why*, but he's-

Techno is warm and *safe*. A *protector*, a flock member, someone to take care of him. Someone to hug him, to make him food, who gives him *shiny things*.

Hugging Techno feels like being in the nest. What the *fuck* does that mean?

And why is this familiar? Why does he feel like he's done this before? It couldn't have been with Dream- he mostly stifled chirping by the time he was adopted, and it was completely stamped out within the first year. He never- he *never* hugged him and chirped like this, not *ever*. When the fuck did he-?

Rough fingers run through his hair. The hug shakes with those comforting huffs. "It's alright, shoat. I'm here."

Tommy chirps again, and then deliberately coughs, trying to disguise it. It definitely didn't work at all, but Techno doesn't call him out on it, thank prime. He wants to drag Techno back into the nest, he wants-

He needs to stop. Just because Techno is his flock doesn't mean he can act so clingy. He needs to let go. He needs to *speak* instead of just chirping.

“...what’s a shoat, anyway?” he croaks out as he tears himself away from Techno, his throat strangling the words, making them sound inhuman with how close they are to more chirps.

“Baby piglin,” Techno murmurs, his voice far too fond-

Wait.

“...I’m fucking *sixteen*, dickhead!”

Chapter End Notes

okay it hasn't even been a week yet and i'm a liar who hasn't even touched alien boy because i just wanted to write this+the starts to some other fics i won't be posting for quite some time but uh. happy new chapter?

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy's pretty torn as he munches on the food Techno brought him. On one hand, he wants to throw Techno into the nest- Tommy will feel safer, Techno will be cozy, it works. On the other hand, he's not caving into this whole instinct thing yet, so he also wants to throw Techno out of his room to make it less tempting. Except Techno is his *Protector*, so he kind of wants him around-

Especially when someone knocks on the door.

Techno glances over at the door, but he's totally calm, unlike Tommy, who's tensing up and setting down his fork. It gets worse when Phil's voice calls through the door. "Tommy? Can I come in?"

They both wait for a response, but Techno's eyes on him make it worse. "...yeah," he calls back, and the door opens.

"I was- oh, Techno?" Phil seems surprised to see him. "I thought you'd be gone by now."

"Eatin' got delayed. We ended up, uh, talkin' for a bit."

"Oh. I see." He glances over at Tommy. "How are you doing, Tommy?" His voice is calm and even, and it just feels *condescending*.

He picks up the fork again, taking another bite of eggs before answering. "Fine," he says harshly. He really doesn't want *Phil* here. Which is... dumb and weird, because he's not, like, *terrible*. He's weird and pushy and he's kind of in charge of whatever the fuck is going on, but he hasn't done anything yet. He's only, like, second worst, after Wilbur. So Tommy *shouldn't* be so upset he's here.

"Techno," Phil murmurs, not nearly quiet enough for Tommy to avoid overhearing. "I told you not to hover around him too much. His instincts won't like a predator being around his nest-"

Tommy slams down the fork and, in one smooth motion, stands from his desk chair, grabs Techno by the arm, and drags him so hard Techno actually *stumbles*, pulling him right into the pile of blankets on the bed. "I think I'm fucking *fine*, actually," Tommy snarks.

Phil's eyes go wide, but he frowns after a moment. "Tommy, I wasn't challenging you. You don't have to do things like this to prove a point, it's not healthy to fight against your instincts- we want you to feel *safe*-"

"The only thing making me feel *unsafe* is you. I don't want *you* here. Techno can stay."

He starts to protest further but stops. Phil looks them both over, his eyes stopping on the necklace dangling from Tommy's throat before looking at Techno, who seems a little uncomfortable but doesn't move from the nest. "Tommy," Phil says slowly. "Are you fine with Techno being in your nest?"

"Fucking... yeah? Obviously? I *put* him here." And it's good for his flock to be in the nest, he thinks. It's the best fucking nest in the world, why would Techno want to be anywhere else, actually?

"But that's not..." He frowns more. "That's not *right*. If you're just getting used to your instincts, they should be *screaming* at you to stay away from Techno right now. I hoped sending him with meals would make you able to tolerate him, but you... you shouldn't be letting him in your *nest* like this."

"Well, he's- he's my fucking *flock*, I guess, so-"

Tommy freezes at the look on Phil's face. Oh. He's mad. He's mad because Techno is *Phil's* flock and Tommy just took him. Techno sits up in the nest, making Tommy more anxious- he's going to *leave*, he was Phil's first so he's going to *go* he said he'd protect Tommy but how is he supposed to protect Tommy from Techno's own flock-

He doesn't go. He chuffs- that's how Techno called it when Tommy asked more about it earlier- and pats Tommy's head. "It's okay, shoat. You're fine."

Oh. Maybe Tommy's more important because he's younger and Phil can take care of himself. Or because he's new to Techno's sounder. Or... something else, but whatever it is, Techno isn't leaving to join Phil. Which is *good*.

"You... you shouldn't be taking predators into your flock this early," Phil whispers. "You're- you're just a *nestling*, you should be anxious around anything that isn't your family until they settle in, let you think rationally again- if Techno is your *flock*, then- then something is horribly wrong."

"...wow. Thanks, Phil," Techno drawls.

"You know that's not what I mean- there's supposed to be an *order* to this, that's not-"

"Ranboo's instincts were all messed up when we met him," he says, letting his hand drop from Tommy's hair. Tommy definitely doesn't have to stifle a grumpy noise at that.

"*Ranboo* was horribly traumatized from being a *lab experiment*-"

"And Theseus has his own things. Look, I told you we should have kept the research from that hybrid facility in the twenties-"

Phil steps closer to the nest- if Tommy was a cat hybrid, his fur would be standing on end. Phil pays him no mind, focused on his argument with Techno. "They were deliberately traumatizing hybrid children to see what it did, Techno, I didn't want to touch *any* of that-"

"But if we did, we'd at least know a little about how it could affect instincts-"

That is more than fucking enough of that. “Hey, can you two shut the fuck up?” Tommy snaps. They both fall quiet. “I don’t give a fuck about this instinct shit. Especially when I don’t know *anything about it* and everyone’s just talking in goddamn circles. The only thing that *fucking* matters is that Techno is my flock and I’m his sounder or what the fuck ever and *you* need to get the fuck away from my- my bed or I’m going to lose my *shit*. ”

Phil pauses, and then sighs. “At least *that’s* normal.” He takes a few steps back from the nest, and Tommy feels a little less stressed, even if he wants Phil out of the room entirely. “When you’re a little less wary of me, I can tell you whatever you need to know about your instincts-”

“Is there not, like, a fucking *book*? How To Avian Instincts Three or whatever?” He doesn’t want to have to *learn* from Phil. He’s used to studying by himself, he doesn’t like being *taught* shit, he can figure it out on his own- especially since it has to do with him. And especially because he’s already fucking it up somehow.

Phil frowns at his *entirely fucking reasonable* suggestion. “That’s not exactly... well, there *are* books, but reading something is different from talking to someone with experience.”

“And when did you *experience* coming into your instincts, hm, Phil? Approximately three million years ago?” Tommy twists around his new ring, needing something to do with his hands to manage his anxiousness. “It is probably very different nowadays, when bird guys aren’t unlocking their instincts while they run from *dinosaurs*- ”

“That wasn’t even three million years ago-”

Tommy just talks right over him. “And anyway considering you are a *very* birdy avian and I am apparently the watered down version it could be very different anyway so why should I trust *you*? ”

“...he’s got a point,” Techno says, and Phil *squawks* in offense. “No, listen, Phil- you’re, uh, the closest thing the world’s got to a pure avian hybrid in... probably at least a thousand years. He’s a modern hybrid. It could be totally different and we wouldn’t know.”

“Wilbur and Fundy-”

“-are directly descended from *you*. They’re over a hundred generations off from modern hybrids. If you’re so worried about Theseus, we should be lookin’ into more recent science.”

“Just buy me a fucking book,” Tommy hisses. They both ignore him.

Phil tilts his head as he thinks. “Well, I doubt we’d be able to hire a specialist, short of kidnapping one and bringing them here-”

“Are you *fucking kidding me*- ”

Techno pats Tommy’s shoulder, clearly trying to quiet him down. He only does so out of *consideration*, because he is so fucking kind to his flock, honestly, Techno should appreciate

him so much. “I think we should bring the kids by. Ranboo’s got first hand experience with this kind of thing, so maybe he’d have some idea of what’s goin’ on.”

“What kind of fucking name is *Ranboo* anyway.”

Phil considers it, and lets out a long sigh. “Well, at least neither of them are predators. And it’d probably be good for Tommy to spend some time with kids around his age... especially since he’s so *bothered* by spending time with *old folks* like us-” Phil looks a little too amused at his own joke-

Wait. “Are you trying to set up a *fucking playdate* for me? I’m basically a fucking adult, you-”

Techno chuffs, and Tommy groans in annoyance. “We’re not settin’ up a *playdate*. We’re bringin’ over someone with experience dealin’ with comin’ into their instincts after they were stunted. An enderman isn’t goin’ to be the same as an avian, but it’s somethin’.”

Tommy sinks back into his nest, crossing his arms. He doesn’t *want* to hang out with kids his age. It would be *weird*. He hasn’t been around someone his age, other than passing them on the street, since he was literally eight years old. He’s *used* to adults, he’s not used to the kind of shit he used to see on TV, teenage besties who were fucking awful to each other or whatever-

Then again, that’s just sitcoms. Real life is probably pretty different. But it’s still not something he wants to get *involved* with. Especially since- “What kind of fucking *kids* do the Syndicate just hang out with?”

“You,” Techno says, and Tommy sputters in offense. “And Ranboo and his husband.”

“...his *what*- you said they were my age!”

Phil chuckles. “They’re both seventeen, actually. And it’s not legal yet, but they insist they’re married.”

“Something about tax benefits, even though neither of them pay taxes,” Techno says, amused. Tommy’s clearly missing out on the joke.

He doesn’t like this *at all*. But as much as he likes his nest, he’s feeling too cooped up- haha, *coop*, oh that’s so annoying he doesn’t want to be making bird puns in his head- so seeing someone *besides* Phil would probably be a good thing. Plus, maybe this Ranboo guy will tell them to go fuck themselves and that Tommy isn’t a freak with fucked up instincts or whatever. “Fine,” he grumbles. “Bring on the weirdos.”

Phil *lights up*, like Tommy just gave him permission to... adopt him or something. Whatever, he’s excited. “Oh, good. I’ll call them right away, see when they’re free.”

“It’s about time for them to visit again anyway,” Techno says, starting to sit up, and it sets Tommy’s heart *racing* for some reason. He doesn’t want Techno to leave the nest, not *yet*-

He reaches out, grabbing him by the arm without thinking. Techno looks at him, raising an eyebrow, and Tommy flushes, letting go. It's harder than it should be. At Techno's curious look, he just shrugs.

Phil lets out a coo. "Techno- stay here a little longer, won't you? You're Tommy's first flock member, he'll want you around for at least a few hours."

Tommy hunches up his shoulders. "It's fine, you can fucking *go*, I'm not that fucking *clingy*."

"It's fine," Techno says, leaning back into the nest. "I almost dragged you to my hoard when you gave me that crown, I understand."

"No, it's *fine*. Go, go-" He weakly tries to shove Techno out of the nest, but he doesn't even roll over. Tommy isn't even putting his full strength into it- he *can't*. He doesn't want Techno to go. He has to stay *right here* instead of going into the rest of the house full of people Tommy can't trust.

"It's okay, it's okay," Phil coos again. "Don't fight your instincts, your first flock member is *special*. Oh, I'm *jealous*, I was so sure it would be me-"

Tommy stifles down a bird noise that tries to escape to display his annoyance. "Shut *up*. He's not even- I think I've done this before."

The room goes quiet, and he immediately regrets mentioning that. Why did he, even? It's not like he *knows*. It's just that he has a vague memory of chirping at... somebody, when he was really little. It's not like it matters.

"Would that be your family?" Phil asks quietly.

Tommy slowly shakes his head. "No. I don't have- I've never had a family. I just think, uh... I don't know. I don't remember. Probably someone from a foster home or something."

"A foster-" Phil cuts himself off sharply. "I see. I'm going to- have a good rest of your day, Tommy. Techno, *stay here*-"

"I wasn't goin' anywhere," Techno huffs, suddenly seeming agitated. "I'm stayin' right here."

Tommy *almost* chirps at Techno promising to stay- but the energy of the room is *off*. He just said something very, very fucking wrong.

...did he never mention he was an orphan before?

tommy has, in fact, mentioned that he's an orphan before. i wonder what they're being weirdos about then

hey should i drop a chapter of a new fic i started or should i leave it until i've finished one of my current fics. like all my fics are going to get updated sporadically but i feel like this one will get updated even rarer until i'm at least done IAHB, so is it worth it?

EDIT: I GOT FUCKING FANART??? [i am going to cry](#)

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Techno is being fucking *clingy*.

Which Tommy is not complaining about! Not really. There's something about his bird brain that likes Techno being clingy- and it is definitely his bird brain and *not* Tommy himself being clingy, because, uh, reasons. Obvious reasons, like the fact that Tommy has barely touched other human beings other than for healing purposes since he was in elementary school.

But Techno has been *clingy* ever since Tommy brought up maybe having had a flock before. He stays near Tommy for most of each day, whenever he leaves he comes back with more gold to make Tommy wear, and he sits in the nest whenever Tommy gets too antsy and can't bring himself to ask him to join him out loud. He just *knows*, and sits down, and it's great but also *weird* because Tommy doesn't want to be a weirdo like Phil who drags everyone to the nest whether they want to be there or not.

Techno doesn't seem to mind, at least. Probably just because he's used to Phil dragging him places. Tommy doesn't want to be the same as Phil, but-

He thinks he needs this, right now. He needs Techno. It's helping him through his head being so fucking *stupid*- no, not his head. His instincts. His instincts that make him chirp when he's lonely, and Techno chuffs or purrs at him in response to let him know he's not alone. His eyes catch on shiny things, and the additions from Techno's hoard keep him engaged, give him rings to twist around and chains to dangle.

And Techno soothes the need for *flock*... even if something in his brain wants *more*, a bigger flock, more people he cares for in the nest- but he's not going to listen to it. Techno is one thing, Techno he can trust because he's just as put out by his instincts as Tommy is. Neither of them can control it, and they're bound by that. But he can't trust that, if he got attached to someone else, they could possibly be as attached to him in return.

Besides, who would he let in? Fundy is... okay, Fundy isn't *bad*, he's awkward but nicer than Tommy thought he would be, but it's still... weird. Fundy was Dream's *boyfriend*, even if Dream was just using him, so it's- not Fundy. Wilbur is right out. And Phil?

He hasn't seen Phil since he got weird about Tommy mentioning his foster homes. Which is good, he doesn't want Phil in the nest, he doesn't want him to take Techno away, but like... logically, it's weird, because Phil is trying to trick him into believing their *family* lie so... shouldn't he be trying to convince him? Techno says he's just busy, but Tommy's still suspicious.

Tommy's lying in the nest, kicking his feet in annoyance. Techno is out, just quickly making lunch for them both- Techno purrs whenever Tommy eats something he's made, and Phil is

probably kind of a shit flock member if he didn't realize how much Techno *needs* to provide like this- which just makes that little part of Tommy that he's trying to shove down whisper that he wouldn't feel so alone if he had his *flock*, a bigger one, so someone could stay with him while Techno's gone.

He's trying to think about literally anything else, but the only other thing on his mind is the growing *itch* in his hands and face. He hasn't healed himself in days now. Techno makes him eat and sleep regularly- and he wants to, anyway, so it's not a sacrifice- but after years of fixing the serious injuries of one to three grown men on a daily basis, the itch settles in fast for him, much faster than it should.

Techno was working on helping Tommy reel back how often he has to use his powers, even before they were flock, a sounder. It was so nice of him, and so subtle that Tommy didn't even realize- Techno wasn't being nice to trick him, or to hold it over his head, he just... *was*. But now it's settling in. Now he has maybe a few days before it starts to *hurt*.

What finally distracts him from both unpleasant topics is the faint sound of a doorbell. ...he didn't even know the house *had* a doorbell, because no one ever comes by but *Charlie*, and he just... lets himself in somehow. Probably something to do with being slime. But *someone* is ringing the doorbell across the house.

Techno knocks at the door, a familiar sound by now, and Tommy moves to the door in a flash, throwing it open for him. "Sounds like the kids are here," Techno huffs as he steps inside. "Eat first. Then you can go meet them."

...shit. Right. *Ranboo and his husband*.

Techno hasn't brought up the topic since Phil left. Tommy tried to ask a little, but Techno mostly shrugged or grimaced in response to his questions, so he let it drop, figuring he could talk to them himself whenever they showed up. Still, it's only been a few days, so he didn't expect them this soon.

...it's going to be uncomfortable to talk to people his age. He'll just have to get over it, though. Still, he takes his time with eating, not wanting to leave the nest just yet. Actually- "Do I have to go out there?"

"Do you want strangers near your nest?"

He makes a good point. Tommy groans before digging into his lunch. He hates going into the hallway, let alone going to the main part of the house-

He's definitely redeveloping his agoraphobia. So he definitely should go out there, even if he doesn't want to, because no fucking *fear* is going to beat him. Tommy rushes through eating so he can get over it. As soon as he's done, he gets to his feet.

"Hold on," Techno hums, reaching over to the bedside table. Some of his hoard is there- Tommy can't wear it all at once, even if Techno wants him to.

And apparently he does, because he brings it *all* onto the bed. “Oh, come on, isn’t this enough?” Tommy holds out his hands. Almost every finger has a ring, and he has almost half a dozen bracelets on one arm- the other one just has his sounder gift.

“No,” Techno answers, holding up a necklace. Tommy is already wearing three. “Piglin tradition with shoats-“

“Still not a child.” The words don’t have much of a bite to them this time.

“-you wear all your gifts from the sounder when you leave the den for the first time.”

“You are so fucking clingy,” Tommy mutters and crosses his arms, his bracelets clanging together. Techno’s unamused expression has him quickly start backtracking. “Which is not a bad thing! At all!”

Techno grunts- not an annoyed one, just in acknowledgement- and gestures for Tommy to come closer. He sighs, and scoots over, close enough for Techno to drape him in more fucking gold. He’s literally running out of room on his body for these.

When he’s satisfied, Tommy is allowed to get to his feet. “They’re going to think I’m weird as hell,” Tommy mumbles as he looks down at himself.

“L.”

“Shut up, Techno. Let’s go.” Tommy heads out into the hall with only a little hesitation at the doorway. It’s fine. His *Protector* is with him, and nothing’s going to fucking *happen*, it’s fine, it’s all fine, he needs to not be freaking out when he meets new people because he already looks like a weirdo with how much jewelry he’s covered in, it’s *fine*-

He follows the sound of voices, distant and unfamiliar, towards the living room. As soon as he steps through the doorway, Wilbur *jumps* to his feet from the couch, looking like an abandoned dog that just caught sight of their owner. “Su- Tommy!” For a moment Tommy feels *joy*, and his lips curl to smile back at Wilbur, but just as soon as it happens it cuts off, Wilbur looking embarrassed and Tommy feeling *gross*.

It wasn’t the same as the disgusting *haze* of calm from when Wilbur basically power-drugged him, so it doesn’t feel like George’s powers, but it’s still unpleasant, and he’s scowling when he looks at the strange additions to the room.

The tall one gets his attention first- Wilbur and Techno are already too fucking tall, and now there’s this bitch. He looks like his head could tap the ceiling if he stopped hunching over. Besides that, he looks- his skin is split down the middle, pure white on one side, the other pitch black, and his eyes glow red and green. That, combined with the sharp horns jutting out from the top of his head, makes him look like a demon.

Which Tommy is pretty familiar with. He was always used to Sapnap’s true form, after all.

The guy stands out so much that Tommy doesn’t even notice the shorter person next to him for a moment, but as soon as his eyes flick down he stops breathing completely.

He shouldn't be familiar. It's been *so long*- they've both aged eight years, Tommy shouldn't *recognize* him. He shouldn't be able to look past the teenaged face, the longer horns, the *burns* scarring all his visible skin- but he is. And he knows who this is. And suddenly, it's like nothing ever happened.

"... *Tubbo*?" Tommy whispers.

"*Cece*?"

Tubbo remembers him too.

Tommy doesn't even realize when he's crossed the room, throwing himself at Tubbo, but Tubbo's arms open up to catch him, even when Tommy almost knocks him over in the process. Tommy laughs, refusing to let go as he manages to stop them from falling, and then he laughs more, and *more*, and Tubbo is laughing too because they're *together*-

It's like he's been fucking *suffocating* without him, and he's only realizing now that he can breathe again. "Tubbo, Tubbo, *primes*, " he gets out between gasps for breath, though whether it's from laughter or the way he's tearing up he isn't sure.

"Cece, holy shit-" Tubbo sounds just as torn between laughing and crying, and it's so, so, good, even when he headbutts his hard horns against Tommy's chest. "You fucking- you asshole, I can't believe you, shows up eight years late-"

"Shut up," he whines, the end turning into a trill. "I didn't *want* to-"

"But you *did*! You *fuck*, Cece, how did you end up with the *Syndicate*?"

Oh, right. There are... other people in the room. A lot of other people. Tommy really doesn't want to let go- his arms *fight* him, it hurts to pull away from Tubbo, *his* Tubbo- but he does, taking a step back. He's not sure where to start, there's so *much*-

"...Cece?" Wilbur asks, quiet but clearly curious, and you know what, that's so much better than explaining anything to Tubbo right now.

Tommy immediately takes the excuse and throws an arm around Tubbo, pulling him into his side, and points at his face. " *This* guy couldn't pronounce my name when we were little, so he ended up calling me that for short-"

Tubbo scoffs in offense. "You couldn't pronounce my name, either!"

Tommy immediately turns up his nose. "Yeah, because no one could. It's not *my* fault you got stuck with Toob-er-clo-sis."

"...you *still* can't pronounce my name!"

"Get a new one, you fuck!"

"Oh, yeah, let me just *get a new name*, like it's that easy-"

“It was for me!” Tubbo pulls back just enough to squint at him, and Tommy shrugs as best as he can without pulling his arm away from Tubbo. “Tommy. Less dramatic than ‘Theseus’, yeah?”

“...yeah, okay,” Tubbo says after scrutinizing him for a long moment. “But I’m not changing Tuberculosis. I don’t know what other names would shorten to Tubbo anyway, and I’m keeping that.”

“Tubzo,” Tommy suggests. “Tubular. Bathtub.”

“I’m going to kill you. I just got you back, and I’m going to kill you.”

For the first time, the stranger in the room speaks up. “Stubborn, that’s got Tubbo in it.” Tommy squints up at him, and he immediately hunches over even more, his eyes darting to the side to avoid looking straight at Tommy. “Um, hi. I’m... I’m Ranboo, I’m... Tubbo’s husband. I’ve heard about you before.”

Tommy squints more, not quite glaring. On one hand, this motherfucker took his place *and more* in Tubbo’s life while he was gone. On the other, Tubbo likes him enough to marry him, so he’s got to be decent enough. Tommy trusts Tubbo’s judgement. “You’ve heard about me?”

“Yeah! Yeah, um-” He’s holding a book to his chest, but he lowers it enough to open it up and poke through the pages. “He told me stories about you, um, I remember your name but not much else... I think you like cows?”

“Fuck yeah I like cows. Who the fuck doesn’t like cows?”

Ranboo shrugs. He’s now officially a-okay in Tommy’s books. He still seems uncomfortable, though, and Tommy frowns- which definitely doesn’t help.

“Ranboo,” Tubbo speaks up. “My beloved. Chill out. Cec- Tommy’s great, find the page where I said-”

“Your *beloved*?” Tommy interrupts. “I thought you were married for tax benefits. Which is stupid, actually, you should just avoid paying taxes entirely. Actually, no, you should pay taxes. Do you know who doesn’t pay taxes? The rich. And heroes. *Heroes* don’t pay taxes, which I think is ridiculous because they’re the ones who make taxes go so high because of all the damage to public infrastructure they do. If anything heroes should be taxed a hundred percent.”

“Ranboo is rich,” Tubbo tells him helpfully.

“Yikes. Not pog.”

“C- Tommy, you’re literally covered in gold right now.”

“Yeah, but that’s not my fault so it doesn’t count.”

Tubbo snorts. “Anyway, Beloved is Ranboo’s last name. And mine, actually. I’m *Tuberculosis Underscore-Beloved*. ”

Tommy scrunches up his nose. “That’s the dumbest last name ever. I’m taking it.”

“Wh- don’t steal my last name! I worked for that!”

“Nope. I’m Tommy Underscore-Beloved now. That’s just a fact.”

Phil interrupts, which is just so rude of him really. “How... do you two know each other?”

Okay, it’s not actually that rude, and Tommy puffs up, excited to brag. “Tubbo’s-“

My best friend. My first, and only real brother. My platonic soulmate. My Tubbo.

“-my flock.” Tommy pauses. He meant to say literally all of those other things instead.

Though he’s surprised at himself, Phil doesn’t seem surprised at all- he looks some kind of mix of happy and relieved, actually. But before he can say anything, Tubbo speaks up. “Oh my fucking- I literally forgot that was why we’re here!”

“Uh, why are we here again?” Ranboo asks, a little timid.

“Because Phil picked up an avian!” Tubbo headbutts Tommy again, a little harder this time. Tommy can still feel the affection behind it. “How the fuck did you keep *that* from me, asshole?”

“I didn’t know!” Tommy immediately defends himself. “I still don’t know! My new theory is that Phil is brainwashing me into thinking I’m a bird with bird instincts so he can kidnap me into his flock. It’s very likely, you know.”

Tubbo narrows his eyes at Phil, and then at Tommy. It’s barely visible behind his long bangs, but Tommy can tell. “While I completely believe that he would-“

“Wh- I’m *sorry*?” Phil asks incredulously.

“-you made bird noises all the time when we were kids.”

Tommy groans. “Yeah, I was just being loud! Making noises for fun!”

“Remember when you broke your arm jumping from the hayloft and you *still* didn’t stop chirping?”

He winced at the memory. He really thought hay was enough to stop his fall. Why didn’t he get his powers *then*, huh? No, he had to heal like a normal person. “Yeah, well, *I* thought it was normal.”

Tubbo pats his arm reassuringly. “That’s because you’re a freak.”

Tommy squawks in offense, and Tubbo just laughs at him. He's the worst. He's the worst and Tommy loathes him and he grabs Tubbo by the hand and starts tugging him out of the room. "Tubbo, c'mere, we've got to- I need you to check out my room, come on-"

Tubbo starts to follow dutifully, but pauses, looking back at Ranboo. "Hey, 'Boo, come with us."

Ranboo glances at Tommy to see if it's okay, and... well, he's not sure, because he needs *Tubbo* in the nest so if Tubbo's only coming if Ranboo does then Ranboo has to come too, but- Ugh. *Ugh*. He tilts his head, gesturing for Ranboo to follow, and he does.

Tommy leads them both straight to the nest. "This is the ugliest room I've ever seen, boss man," Tubbo tells him.

"I know, I love it."

"I like it," Ranboo says quietly as he looks around. "It's very, uh, patchwork? It doesn't feel stuck to a single aesthetic. Or a single color palette. Or a single... anything."

"Finally!" Tommy chirps. "A man who can appreciate my vision." He keeps tugging Tubbo over to the bed, but when he climbs on, Tubbo... doesn't? "Tubs, c'mere."

Tubbo just squints at the bed. "What's the deal with... this?"

"It's, uh..." man, it's embarrassing to say it. "A... nest?"

"...a nest."

"Yeah- it's a good one. The best in the world, probably. You should be in it. Right now." Tubbo doesn't move. "Please."

Tubbo looks at the bed like it's going to bite him, but after an incredibly pitiful chirp from Tommy, he climbs onto it, taking a seat on the blankets. Tommy immediately starts rearranging the ones near him to try to make it even cozier. "So... what's the deal with this?"

"*No* fucking idea, Tubs. I've got a bird brain that's screaming at me that I need to put *flock* in the *nest*, and I guess I counted you as flock all the way back then, so-"

"No, I mean *all* this. The Syndicate." Tommy stops rearranging the blankets, but Tubbo goes on. "I mean, the last thing I knew, you and Clay were promising you'd come back to visit all the time, and then... nothing. And I looked into it! As soon as I had an opportunity I tried to find out where you were, but- your files were all messed up, and so were his. It was like you both disappeared-"

"I did," Tommy blurts out. "Uh, kind of- I kind of did stop... existing. Outside of, uh, Clay's house. I didn't- I wasn't going to school anymore, the caseworker was fake, so it was all-"

"What do you mean, the caseworker was fake?" Tubbo asks, alarmed.

He looks down, and starts taking off some of his jewelry, just for something to focus on while he talks. “Miss Puffy was the Captain. She was Clay’s... mom, I guess. And Clay was- he was actually the hero *Dream*. It wasn’t me getting adopted. It was me getting *recruited* as a healer against my will.”

He keeps dropping bracelets and rings on the nest next to him, but Tubbo’s hand reaches out and covers one of his. The skin feels weird- the burn scars are so rough compared to the unmarred skin he remembers- but it’s still so *familiar* it could push him to tears. “My dad found me and adopted me about a year after you left.”

Tommy’s head shoots up. “Oh, *shit*, what was he like-?”

“He’s the villain JSchlatt.”

“...oh.”

They both look at each other for a long moment before sighing in unison, years of tension going with it, at least for this moment.

After a minute, Tubbo continues. “He was an asshole, obviously. An alcoholic, a piece of shit, hit me and his husband-“

“Oh my fucking *prime* I can’t believe Quackity didn’t tell me he had a stepson my age, we could have met up *months* ago-”

Tubbo cuts him off. “How do you know *Quackity*?”

“Found him when I ran from Dream, I’ll explain later, keep going.”

Tubbo frowns, but is apparently willing to accept that for now. “He sucked. I ended up poisoning him and he had a heart attack-”

Ranboo gasps sharply. Tommy forgot he was here, honestly. “Tubbo, you’re- you’re not supposed to tell anyone that, I thought-”

His voice immediately gets softer when he turns to check on Ranboo. “It’s okay, ‘Boo, he’s Cece, remember? My best friend from before I knew you?”

Ranboo furrows his eyebrows, looking down at his book. “But I thought- we were here to meet someone named Tommy, weren’t we? No, wait, he *was*, but... I’m sorry,” he says, voice filled with shame.

“No, no, you’re right,” Tubbo immediately reassured him. “Cece is just going by the name Tommy now. They’re the same person. Do you have a pen?” Ranboo feels around, finding one in his pocket. “You should write that down.”

Ranboo starts scribbling something in his book, and Tommy glances at Tubbo. “Uh... memory problems?”

“Um, yeah,” Ranboo answers instead. “It’s- I have trouble making new memories. I’ll- I’ll remember you better after we’ve met a few times, I promise!”

Tommy turns to face him. “Do you want, uh... I’m a healer. If you didn’t know. I can try to help.”

“...you can what?”

“Try to help. With your memory shit. I helped someone a few months ago, but their thing was like... brain damage or something, I don’t know your deal, but I could *try* anyway.”

“Oh, fuck,” Tubbo says. “Of fucking *course* you’re the one that helped Karl!”

“I’m literally so powerful and awesome and super cool. Anyway, I’ll give it a shot, if you want.”

Ranboo glances between Tommy and his book for a few moments. “Um... one... one second.” He takes a minute to write a new entry into it before shutting it and putting the pen back in his pocket. He approaches the nest cautiously, which Tommy appreciates, and shows equal respect- if not *greater*, Ranboo should be grateful- by letting him sit on the edge of the nest. Tommy holds a hand out, and Ranboo hesitantly lets him take it.

The itch in Tommy’s hands disappears immediately as Tommy heals him. It’s not as simple as just going ‘oh, I’ll just fix *everything*-’ though he does, kind of. He can feel things... *missing*. Damaged connections. Shit he probably should have learned about in school, but he didn’t, so now he’s just reconnecting things that feel *right*.

And he needs it to be right, because there’s a lot wrong- and it’s not just the same deterioration that Karl had. Whatever happened *here* wasn’t natural. He’s not about to ask, though, he’s just going to *fix* it, fix everything- from the deliberately-inflicted brain damage to the weird, tear-track shaped scars on Ranboo’s face.

When he lets go, he has a full bouquet of alliums and tulips. It’s almost too much to fit in his lap. He ends up shoving some of them into Ranboo’s hand- his hand that hasn’t moved since Tommy let it go. Ranboo looks... shocked? Confused? Haha, he hopes he didn’t just heal him *wrong* somehow-

“Tommy,” Ranboo says quietly. “Tommy, who, um, used to be Cece... which is... you said earlier it’s short for Theseus, I think. You like... cows, and animals in general, and... and music? Tubbo gave you his father’s vinyls when you were adopted.”

Tommy turns to look at Tubbo. “That’s memories, right? He’s remembering shit. I think we’re good?”

Tubbo looks just as shocked as Ranboo. Ranboo keeps talking, mostly to himself, muttering stuff Tommy doesn’t recognize at all- more things he’s remembering, probably. And then Tommy’s being shoved out of the way as Tubbo jumps for Ranboo, hugging him tightly. Ranboo immediately hugs back, curling down to fit around him. “Holy shit, Boo, *Boo*-”

“Tubbo,” Ranboo says, voice sounding just as wet, and Tubbo immediately pulls back to look up at him.

“No, no, don’t cry-” Tubbo reaches up, trying to catch his tears before they can fall, but they just drip over it, and *sizzle* against his face.

Yikes. Is he allergic to his own tears or something? Tommy doesn’t hesitate to reach out, pressing a hand to Ranboo’s upper arm, and another tulip grows as he heals the burn. Ranboo yelps in surprise, but quickly turns to look at Tommy. “Tommy- Tommy, I don’t- I don’t know how to-”

“Relax,” he says quickly. He doesn’t know how to deal with... whatever that’s going to be, so he’s just not going to. Besides, healing is just... healing. It’s *literally* what he’s meant for, he doesn’t need to be thanked or whatever for it. “You’re Tubbo’s, so like. Free healing forever I guess.”

“I- what?” He sounds genuinely confused.

It makes Tommy huff. It should be *obvious*, shouldn’t it? “Tubbo’s my flock. You’re his husband or *whatever*. That makes you... bbbbasically flock. Maybe. I don’t know, I’m still new to this and I barely know you, but you’re Tubbo’s so free healing- oh come on that’s *not* an invitation to cry more!”

And yet he is, more tears burning into his face. That has to hurt, which... probably isn’t helping him to stop crying. “I’m sorry,” he gets out between gasps as more flowers blossom beneath Tommy’s hands. “I’m sorry, I just- I’m overwhelmed, there’s- there’s so *much*, so many things I- and I *know* why I’m crying, I usually forget while it happens, so it’s- and you’re, you’re so nice! I was afraid to meet someone new, but you’re *nice*!”

“...awww, Tommy, you’re *nice*,” Tubbo says, trying to tease him. It doesn’t work so well when he’s still recovering from his own tears.

“Shut up, Tubbo,” he huffs. “It’s just- I’m a healer. I can fix shit. Why *wouldn’t* I?”

“I dunno, so you don’t get exhausted?” Tubbo says, his voice a little lighter this time, more genuine. “Oh, are you going to need a nap now?”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “Yeah, right. The last time healing made me *tired*, it was because I grew a whole human leg. I’m not going to need a *nap* just because-”

“You fucking what?” Tubbo hisses, all amusement instantly gone.

It makes Tommy a *little* nervous. Not, like, a lot, but that was a fucking mood whiplash if he’s ever heard one. And he’s heard a *lot*. “Oh, um... I was doing an experiment.”

“An experiment.”

“Yeah, I... wanted to try growing back limbs instead of, um, reattaching them.”

Tubbo's eyes narrow behind his fluffy bangs. "And why were you *around* people with severed limbs?"

Tommy warbles as his nerves get worse, a quiet song of *don't be mad*. "Um- back with the heroes, after a bad fight, and, Techno when he tortures people sometimes-"

This time it's Ranboo who reacts, sounding *horrified*. "Techno makes you *reattach severed-*?"

"No!" Tommy interrupts quickly. "I mean- I want to do it. It, um- I'm used to using my powers a lot, so I need to... I need big things to heal sometimes, while we work on dialing it back so I don't *have* to use them all the time. Helping out with torture works. Plus, it means he stopped thinking of me as, like, a sweet little *healer* who can't handle blood or whatever-"

"Cece." Tommy falls quiet, and Tubbo shifts closer, taking one of Tommy's hands again. "What happened to you?"

It's a loaded question. It's the biggest question in the world. It's one he doesn't know how to answer because he's still... *realizing* what happened to him. He's still processing it all. He feels like he'll always be finding new things to process. "I told you. I got taken by Dream."

"Yeah, but- what does that *mean*?"

They're in the nest. The nest is safe, so Tommy's safe, so he can talk about this. That's... probably how this works. And it's just *Tubbo*. And Ranboo, someone Tubbo trusts with his hand in marriage, so it has to be fine. "It means- Clay was an asshole. He adopted me to have a pet healer always on hand. I spent every day fixing up him and his friends. They treated me like shit. The..." Tommy hesitates. "I think the Syndicate is trying to help me get less fucked up. They're really fucking *bad* at it, but I think they're trying."

Tubbo doesn't hesitate to ask his next question. "How did the Syndicate find you?"

"I found them," Tommy tells him, squeezing his hand. Tubbo squeezes back. "I ran away, and I needed to find somewhere that Dream couldn't just take me back, or even find me in the first place. So, I... figured the Syndicate couldn't be as bad. Even if they're villains, they *couldn't* be as bad." He still wants to believe it, so badly. He just... *can't*. "I broke into their house, traded my services in exchange for them killing Dream, and now I'm... here."

"Do you- do you not want to be here?" Tubbo bites his lip as he thinks. "It'd be hard, but we could get you out. Ranboo can teleport, and if we got to Las Nevadas fast, Quackity owes me so we could get enough money to get set up somewhere far away, like Rivendell or Mezalea. I can make us fake documents-"

Tommy loves him so much. "Okay, Tubbo? Tubbo? I love that. I love that you are willing to immediately throw your life away after finding me again for like ten minutes. I would do the same for you. *However.*"

"However?"

...however, what? He doesn't want to be here, not really. Well, his nest is here, and Techno is here, so he kind of wants to be here, but that's one person in a house of four that he likes and one nest that can be rebuilt somewhere else. It's not enough to *keep* him here. Not when they're trying to- to convince him that they-

The real problem, he thinks, is that even if he can't believe them, he *wants* to, so badly. He wanted to believe that Wilbur wasn't lying when he said that they want him for reasons besides him being a healer. That Phil really does just want to break past some fucking... weird instinct walls so that Tommy can try to trust him, that Techno would want him around not just because he was tricked into taking Tommy as his sounder. That Fundy's concern when he heard about what Dream did was *real*.

That he's cared for. That he's *capable* of being cared for, instead of just being used as a healer or as a punching bag.

He can't believe them, because no one's ever cared. Except Tubbo, but Tubbo's *different*- or maybe he isn't. Maybe Tubbo was the one normal person in the hell that was the foster system, full of angry kids and adults who were stretched too thin to care about the loud, annoying child. Maybe Dream and George were the outliers, maybe the hero system is just *busted* in how it cares more about someone's powers than who they are as a person. Maybe he's finally in a place that isn't going to ruin him.

Or maybe it'll all come crashing down, and he won't be ready for it because he wanted to *hope*.

A hissing sound startles him out of his thoughts, and he quickly looks down and realizes that there are two pairs of arms around him. He didn't even realize they both started hugging him. He didn't even realize he was *crying*- or that the tears were dripping down to land on Ranboo's arm. "Fuck, shit-

"It's okay," Ranboo says. "I, um. I got overwhelmed a lot when I- when I got out of. The place. I was stuck in for a long time. I got burned a lot then."

"Sorry," he croaks anyway, and reaches up to dry his tears with his sleeve. When his hands and face are dry enough, he heals Ranboo *yet again*, and tosses the flowers aside. "I, uh... I like it here. Kind of. I don't know, I'm still- I kind of can't believe it."

"They're freaks," Tubbo says, muffled by how tightly he's hugging Tommy. "They're *nice* and Phil is like, constantly one step from adopting us, and Techno is teaching Ranboo how to brew potions, and Wilbur's really funny with the *weirdest* hobbies. ...I reckon, if you're... recovering from shit, this is the second best place to be."

"Second best?"

"The best is with *us*, obviously."

That gets a small laugh out of Tommy, and he finally hugs Tubbo back. "Yeah, well. When I can leave the house, I'll come visit you every other day. For real, this time."

“Bullshit,” Tubbo huffs. “We’re coming to see *you*. Every day. They built this stupid add-on to the house, there has to be a guest bedroom, I’d assume.”

“Yeah, like two of them.”

“Good. ‘Boo, you wanna move in?”

Ranboo hums. “Um, sure. At least our utility bill will go down.”

Tommy twists his head to look at him. “...aren’t you *rich*?”

“Well- um, kind of, but that’s not really- jeez, I just don’t want to spend a ton of money on Tubbo’s *two hour showers*- ”

“You just don’t get it because you can’t shower!” Tubbo shoots back, getting up more to talk over Tommy’s head without letting go of him.

Ranboo equally doesn’t let go. “Well- yeah, obviously?! But I still know most people don’t shower that long!”

Tommy feels... safe. Comfortable. He has Tubbo back, and it’s like puzzle pieces slotting it- and Ranboo feels like one, too. Not one he was *missing*, but... one he just hadn’t realized was there yet. But he is, Tommy thinks. He fits in just right. *Flock*.

He chirps, loud and sudden, and it surprises them enough to cut off Tubbo’s rant about the comforts of showering and his hatred of the dry, outside world. “...don’t mind *me*, go back to talking about Tubbo’s stupidly long showers.”

“See!” Ranboo immediately says. “See, Tommy gets it!”

And he does. He *really* gets it.

Chapter End Notes

tommy: man i should start healing from my trauma
tommy: or i could just sit in my nest for the next eighty years
tommy: hm. i can't decide, these options both sound equally good

oh hey, also beeduo is here!

[if you didn't see this fanart before look at it now](#)

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

warning: i have no idea how to warn for this. um.... canon-compliant slime injuries at the end of the chapter?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil is fluttering around the front hall, counting the luggage and checking cabinet drawers. “And you’re sure you’ll be fine for a few days?”

“Yes, Phil,” Tommy drones.

“And you won’t forget to keep your phone charged, right?”

“It hasn’t dipped below fifty percent since you gave it to me, Phil.”

“You’ve only had it a day, that doesn’t mean much. I went grocery shopping, and Ranboo has my credit card if you need anything else... Ace’s number is next to the landline in case something happens to your cell phones...” Phil frets, pacing more.

“Phil!” Wilbur cheerfully steps into the hall, dragging his own suitcase behind him. “Tommy will be okay without us for a day or two,” he says, as if Tommy didn’t overhear him whining about leaving him ‘alone’ - with just Tubbo and Ranboo- at least twice in the last few days. They still haven’t really spoken- never alone, never more than ‘do you want anything while I’m shopping’ or ‘go fuck yourself’ - but Wilbur is *desperately* trying to get on Tommy’s good side. It’s kind of pathetic, but also kind of nice. Tommy’s... still figuring out how to feel about Wilbur.

Phil hums, displeased. “I don’t like it.”

“You’re just clingy,” Tommy says before turning away. “Ranboo says I’ll be fine because he and Tubbo are here.”

“He’s not an *expert*- ”

“Neither are you, you elderly hen. Go put your shit in the car, *I’m* going to say bye to Techno, and it’s going to be fine because *I’m* a well-adjusted bird brain, unlike you.”

Phil huffs a laugh. “You’re literally the exact opposite of well-adjusted, Tommy.”

“Because *I’m* a fucked up bird brain who can compartmentalize shit better than you.”

“Which isn’t *healthy*- ”

“Get out of here, Phil.” Tommy ducks down the hall, heading towards Techno’s room.

Ranboo has a couple theories about why Tommy is the way he is. His memory is still a bit shit- there’s a lot of things missing, Tommy could fix broken connections and make it easier for him to recall things, but he couldn’t bring back memories Ranboo never formed in the first place- but he remembers enough from his days as a lab experiment to have some science behind said theories, too.

(He remembers too much, he has *nightmares* now because of what Tommy did, and Tommy feels guilty about hurting his flock even if he was just trying to help. He’s equally pleased that, even in the throes of his nightmares, Ranboo still sleepwalks to Tommy’s nest for *safety*, that Tommy can be a protector too.)

The most likely, apparently, is that Tommy is so incredibly fucked up (though he didn’t say it like that because Ranboo is a pussy) that his instincts are melding with his human brain. Phil says that it’s supposed to be that he’d have some times where his instincts are super strong, and then they recede to the back of his mind until something sets them off. Instead, Tommy and the bird brain are *constantly one*- so Techno is safe to the bird brain because *Tommy* thinks he’s safe. Or something like that.

Anyway, maybe it’s permanent, maybe it isn’t, but right now he’s busy trying not to be upset that his *Protector* is going on a trip for an uncertain amount of time. Hypothetically, because of how fucked up his instincts are, he *should* be able to overpower them by thinking like a human... but it’s harder than he thought it would be. It’s okay- he has Tubbo, he has Ranboo- but part of him is huffy about being abandoned anyway, which is why he throws open the door to Techno’s room much more violently than he needs to.

“If you break my door, you’re fixin’ it,” Techno says, not looking up from the bag he’s packing. It’s good to know that even the almighty Blade can be a procrastinator sometimes.

“I would never. And if I did, it wouldn’t be my fault. Why is your door so shit it can be broken that easily, huh?” he asks as he takes a seat on the edge of Techno’s bed.

Tommy’s only been in this room twice before- when he tried to steal one of Techno’s knives, and then a few days ago when he got into an argument with Phil and Techno was *overwhelmed* and ‘needed’ to bring Tommy to his ‘den’. He’s not complaining, he got another knife out of it, and fuck knows he’s starting his own collection of those. Still, despite how he’s not really *familiar* with this room, he’s comfortable enough. It’s Techno’s, after all.

And Techno is his Protector *who shouldn’t be leaving*-

“Sooo... how’s Fundy?” Tommy asks to distract himself.

Techno shrugs. “Nervous, last I asked. Wilbur’s too excited and he’s rushin’ him a bit.”

“A bit.”

“...a bit.”

“It’s been three days. It’d be less if you guys didn’t have all that fucking ‘mysterious preperation’,” Tommy says, making air quotes to show just how weird and nonsense the phrase is to him.

Techno chuckles, zipping up his suitcase. “Alright, he’s rushin’ him a lot. But he’s been waitin’ for Fundy to agree for years now, he’s just excited. First thing to go right since he started screwin’ up with you.”

Tommy just huffs, leaning back and looking up at the ceiling. Some weird runes are painted on it, and his eyes trace them for a few long moments.

“...you have your knives, right?”

“Yu-p.” He pops the last letter.

“No one knows how to get here besides our people. You’re not in any danger. Even if somethin’ did happen, you know how to use a knife, and Ranboo is capable of teleportin’ you somewhere safer in the unlikely chance that Tubbo didn’t take out an attacker’s kneecaps-”

“Tech,” Tommy interrupts. “Have you considered stifling your instincts until they merge with your human thoughts so you can influence them in weird and fucked up ways that *aren’t* rambling about how much of a worrywart you are?”

When Techno is silent, Tommy tilts his head back down to look at him. He just looks exasperated. “I can’t wait until we find you an actual therapist.”

“ ‘*Oh I can’t wait until we find you an actual therapist,* ’ ” Tommy mocks, pitching his voice lower. “ ‘*I’m Techno and if I walk ten feet away from my shoat I will actually cry*’ - ”

“ ‘*I’m Tommy and I think jokin’ about my horrible trauma basically makes it go away*’ - ” Techno tries to mock him back, but it’s the worst impression Tommy has ever heard in his *life* and he laughs hard enough he almost falls off the bed. Techno just shakes his head and pulls the suitcase over to the door. “Out of my room, Theseus. I’m lockin’ it behind me.”

Tommy squawks. “Oh, come on! I was just *kidding* when I said I was gonna steal your cape!”

“I left it out in the hall closet,” Techno tells him, and Tommy goes quiet. He’s not going to steal the cape. He *is not*. Even if it would be perfect for the nest and he really, really wants it, he’s not going to, because he can overpower his instincts. Probably. Techno gently pushes him out the door and steps into the hall. “I’m lockin’ the door so Tubbo doesn’t get into my potion ingredients.”

“*Hey!*” Tubbo yells from a few rooms over in offense.

Techno ignores it. “He can probably break in anyway, but it’s somethin’. Try to stop him if he goes for it, alright?”

Tommy laughs. “Are you kidding? Absolutely fucking not. I’ve never seen potions get made before, Tubbo can do what the fuck ever he wants.”

“...Ranboo has most potion recipes written in his book, if he doesn’t remember them personally. Don’t use any of my phantom membranes, they’re hard to import. And-” Techno hesitates. “If you wait, instead, I’ll teach you myself.”

“So... you’re gonna teach me wood carving, jewelry... making, sign language, and now fucking *potions* ? I feel like I’m in school.” He wants to learn it all so very badly. He doesn’t have enough time in the fucking *world*.

Unless.

“Gotta do somethin’ with all that spare time you’ve got,” Techno says. “We should only be gone three days at most. Preferably two. We’ll call to let you know we’re on our way back as soon as we’re back to civilization-”

“Okay, *Dadno*. ”

Techno winces at that. “No. Look, just- just be safe. Okay?”

Tommy hesitates a little. There’s no real *good* response. Part of him wants to say he won’t be- it would upset Techno, and he’d stay. Part of him wants to say he *will* be safe, without Techno, he doesn’t *need him*- which would upset Techno, and he’d stay. Most of him knows that this is Fundy’s big moment, where he ‘embraces eternity’ or whatever, and the whole family needs to be there for him, so Tommy can’t fuck this up just because he’s-

Not jealous. He needs another word that means jealous without it making him seem like a fucking embarrassment. “I’ll- be okay until you’re back,” Tommy decides to say.

It’s a good choice, and Techno gives him a small smile. “I’ll be back soon, shoat.”

“Fuck off. Get out. Go.”

Despite them giving their goodbyes, Tommy follows Techno back to the front of the house. The rest of the family is there, fitting their things into the back of the car. Fundy stands off to the side, and Tommy peels away from Techno to wander over to him.

“Hi,” Fundy greets him, a little awkwardly. He’s been busy since Tommy started leaving his room again- something about working on a game? “You’ll be okay while we’re... gone, right?”

“Primes, I’ll be fine. Are *you* going to be okay?”

Fundy peers over at everyone else for a moment, making sure they’re busy. Wilbur and Techno are arguing over how much Wilbur is trying to bring. “I’m... still nervous. They haven’t told me what I have to do, yet, so I’m kind of-”

“You know you’re probably going to have to kill people, right?” Fundy falls silent and stares at him. “...it’s Old Magic. It’s all about equal sacrifices. Living forever feels like it’d make you cut a bunch of other lives short.”

“That’s... I don’t think that’s- they’d tell me first, wouldn’t they-?”

Tommy scoffs. “Yeah, right. I’m one *hundred* percent sure Wilbur wouldn’t tell you until you were already in the mysterious location that doesn’t have cell reception so you can’t chicken out.” Fundy chokes, realizing how *super likely* that is. “You should do it anyway, though. If they’re gonna make you kill people, it’d probably just be people they would have killed *anyway*, so...”

“I’m not-!” Fundy lowers his voice. “I’m not a *killer*, Tommy, I’m a programmer! I made Minecraft, I’m not-”

“You fucking *what*?”

Fundy pauses. “Did you not know that’s the game I work on all the time?”

Tommy is fucking *awestruck*. He’s never played it himself before, but Dream and his friends played it when they weren’t on patrol. Tommy always thought it was cool, even though he had to watch from the doorway so Dream wouldn’t notice his presence. How the *fuck* did Dream not mention his boyfriend made the one and only good video game? “You made fucking *Minecraft*.”

“I mean, I have a team now that it’s bigger, but yeah,” Fundy says bashfully before shaking his head. “That’s not the point, I’m not- I can’t *kill* people-“

“It’s easier than you think, fox boy. Okay, think of it *this* way-“ Tommy grins at him. “When you’re immortal, no one can ever take over Minecraft after your death and add microtransactions.”

Fundy’s eyes go wide, and then he sighs. “I hate that that felt like a good reason for a moment.”

“They won’t even wait until you’re cold before they decide how to put the dragon behind a paywall.”

“My team is better than that-“

“Yeah, for now. When some sleazy wrong’un offers them money in exchange for the rights? Suddenly netherite is DLC-only.”

“Stop, stop,” Fundy says with a little laugh. “I’ll- look, I’ll figure out what to do when I *actually* know, okay? I... I’ll figure it out.”

Tommy pauses before patting him on the back. “Good luck. Have fun. Only kill wrong’uns. Make sure one of them is Wilbur.”

He laughs again, a little louder. “Shut up, Tommy. Um, I’ll see you when we’re back.”

“See you when you’re a god or something.” Tommy wanders back towards the house, ignoring Wilbur calling his goodbyes.

He steps inside, shuts the door, and waits until he hears the car drive away. Then-

“It’s time to *fucking* party, boys!” he calls out.

Ranboo pokes his head out from the kitchen. “We’re... not partying, though?”

“Look, I know you guys are used to no adult supervision, but this is the first time *I’ve* been really alone since I stayed in Las Nevadas,” Tommy huffs. “And before that, it was never. So we are going to eat everything in the fridge, watch something rated R, and maybe go through Wilbur’s room for anything interesting.”

“No point,” Tubbo calls from a distance. “I already went through it.”

“....yeah, I shouldn’t be surprised by that,” Tommy says. “Junk food and movies will do.”

Ranboo steps out of the kitchen, his arms full of large bags of chips. Wilbur actually did go shopping for them, which was... alright of him. Tommy is going to milk this whole ‘Wilbur trying to get on his good side’ thing as long as possible. He carries them off to the living room, Tubbo meeting him partway from... wherever he was... to grab half.

Tommy’s eyeing the hall closet, trying not to think about how Techno left the cape in the hall closet *specifically* so he could put it in the nest, when the landline starts ringing. He rolls his eyes- it’s been five minutes, *max*, and they’ve gone over everything a dozen times, there is literally *nothing* they should be calling about.

He reaches out for the phone, but hesitates- he was never allowed to answer Dream’s phone, and Tommy hasn’t gotten a call on his new cell phone since everyone he knows lives here. It’s kind of weird. He picks it up and holds it to his ear. “Hey?”

“*Tommy*,” Quackity says, sounding wrecked. “No one’s answering their phones, where are they?”

“Oh- uh, they just left for a trip. What’s going on? They’ll probably answer a call from me.”

“They-?” The line goes quiet for a second, and Tommy almost thinks Quackity hung up before he starts up again. “No, it’s- I don’t need them. Tommy, can you- can I hire you? Please, it’s- it’s an emergency, I don’t know what to do-“

“Whoa, hang on, Big Q, what- what happened?”

Tubbo drops a hand on Tommy’s shoulder, startling him. “It’s Quackity? What’s wrong?”

Tommy doesn’t have time to answer as Quackity answers, but he shifts the phone so they can both hear. “It’s Charlie. He’s... he got hurt. Badly. He’s- it’s a burn, I don’t know what burning does to *slime*, he’s not responding or- or-“

Tubbo gasps sharply before running to the other room. Tommy puts the phone back to his ear, trying not to panic. “I don’t... I don’t know if I can heal that, big man. I mean, he’s not a... I can try. I’ll *definitely* fucking try, Charlie’s-” His first friend after escaping Dream. The guy he could talk to about anything, because god knows the slime with zero social skills wouldn’t judge him for it. The one who taught him to make flower crowns. “I’ll try.”

Quackity takes a shaking breath. “Good. Good, I- I’ll send Karl to get you, he’s- I think he’s near you-”

Tubbo walks back into the hall, Ranboo rushing alongside him. “Where are you and Charlie now?”

“Uh- the casino’s basement, he got in the way of- someone’s training-”

“Don’t bother sending Karl. I know a teleporter, I’ll be there in two seconds.” Tommy puts the phone down, ignoring Quackity’s response, even though it sounds alarmed. Probably just figuring out that Tommy has a connection to Tubbo. Doesn’t matter right now. “Some training place beneath the casino?” he asks Ranboo.

Ranboo’s eyes light up. “I remember there! Mr. Quackity’s fiancé was there, and he-”

“Not the time, Boo,” Tubbo interrupts, voice tight.

He ducks his head and takes them both by the arms. “Right, I’m-”

A flash of purple and black, void as far as the eye can see-

“-sorry,” Ranboo finishes, letting go of them, and Tommy stumbles hard, almost falling to the ground. That was... disorienting.

Not as disorienting as the sight in front of him. Quackity, a mess, his suit scorched and hands covered in burn blisters. Charlie, barely shaped like a person, laid out on the floor, his slime still *bubbling*, how long has it been-?

Sapnap, hovering over Quackity, his eyes wide in shock when they meet Tommy’s.
“Tommy?”

“...Pandas?”

Where is Tommy’s *Protector* when he needs him?

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the long delay on this chapter.... i had a burst of energy for literally every project that i HAVEN'T posted. couldn't write alien boy, had to write the beginning of a bunnyblade oneshot. couldn't work on karl dadcobs au, had to work on a monster!sbi fic. couldn't write IAHB, my beloved, my baby, because my brain demanded DRAGON AU.

i am only ever productive in all the wrong ways. hopefully the next chapter will come out soon enough? but i honestly can't promise anything with the way my brain is

jumping hyperfixations. i only managed this one bc i bought some new fidget toys, so maybe those will keep helping? we'll see.

i hope you enjoyed, despite the long wait!

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There's a lot of things to say about seeing Sapnap.

The nicest- he's kind of missed him. Of the three, Sapnap was the one he had the least bad memories of. It's not saying much, but Sapnap never deliberately hurt him, and he didn't like when Dream did, and he thought George putting him to sleep was wrong. It wasn't enough, but it was *something*, and Tommy didn't have anything else back then.

The worst- he wants to kill him. Sapnap has his *discs*. The discs Dream stole, because Tommy was bad, because his *discs* were bad just because they were made by a villain. Fuck, Sapnap probably had them the night he comforted Tommy through his crying fit. And even worse than that, he's standing next to a *boiling* Charlie- what else could have done this, besides Sapnap's powers?

The weirdest- Sapnap looks so comfortable. Not *feelings-wise*, no, Sapnap looks like he was already panicking *before* Tommy showed up. More like... he looks comfortable in his own skin. Probably because he's actually wearing it for once.

Sapnap's a demon hybrid. Dream told Tommy about it the day he introduced him, partially praising it and calling Sapnap cool, partially a warning that Sapnap was dangerous, that Tommy shouldn't get too close, he could get *hurt*. Of course, Sapnap didn't look dangerous. That day- and most days, in fact- he just looked like a regular guy.

Then Sapnap started babysitting him, and then he didn't feel like putting on the facade anymore, so he would shift into his true form. Tommy still found it cool, even back then, when Sapnap's skin would shimmer and change to black scales and horns sprouted from the top of his head.

With his true form did come more dangers, though. When he was human-shaped, a lot of his demonic strength and fire powers were partially sealed off. He was still strong, still capable of starting fires, but it was nothing compared to when he was a demon. Sapnap wasn't the best at controlling it that way, though- he said it was much harder to control that *amount* of power- and sometimes a pat on the back would knock Tommy to the ground, or a guiding hand would leave a burn scar. Sapnap would apologize, and let him heal any injuries Sapnap caused as long as Tommy promised not to tell Dream, so Tommy didn't mind *that* much. At least they were accidents instead of punishments.

But now he's in his true form, the one he never used except when he was alone with Tommy. Never wanting to make George uncomfortable, always listening to Dream when he brought up the dangers, Sapnap was always stuck in his human form- but now he's here, with Quackity, and with Charlie in a melted *puddle* on the floor.

It's weird. It's confusing. It's- "What the fuck happened?" Tommy asks, gritting his teeth as he glares down Sapnap.

"Tommy, you- what are you-?" Sapnap just sounds confused, like he's just ignoring the fact that there's an *unresponsive* Charlie laid between them, that *he* probably did this to.

"What the *fuck* did you do to Charlie?!"

Quackity awkwardly starts to stand, unable to brace himself with how burned his hands are. "There was an accident," he says, voice high-pitched with alarm. "There's- can you just heal him, we can sort *this* out after-"

"This'?" Sapnap interrupts, looking at him. "Babe, you- you *know* Tommy, you knew I was looking for him and you fucking- you just let me *wonder*? "

Oh, great. This is- so much, and Tommy doesn't have fucking *time* for it. He starts peeling off the jewelry on his hands and wrists- he doesn't want them to melt if he's about to try to heal still-bubbling slime- and pushes them into Ranboo's hands. "Hold onto those."

Ranboo squeaks, but holds them close to his chest, and Tommy strides over to Charlie, ignoring the bickering... couple?... above him as he kneels down. He braces himself for pain before shoving his hands into Charlie's chest.

It fucking *burns*, obviously- if he wasn't healing himself at the same time, he thinks his skin might actually fucking melt off. Tommy gasps sharply for breath, but desperately tries to ignore it and clings to what he can *feel* of Charlie. It's not the same as healing a person, not at all. Healing people is like... feeling what's wrong, and tugging on it until it fixes itself- pulling split skin together, reconnecting severed nerves, pushing all the illness in a body to one spot and then squishing it into nothing- but this is so... disconnected. Like every inch of slime is its own person.

Tommy doesn't know where to start. He does anyway, trying to cool the heat like it's a fever, and it... sort of works, but it only cools the sections he's actively touching. He has to move his arms through Charlie's body and start healing again, and again, and again. It's strangely tiring, but he isn't done yet.

When the slime has cooled to almost room temperature, it's a *start*, but a worrying amount has... evaporated? Boiled off? He doesn't know what to call it. It's... dehydration, either way, he guesses, and *that's* harder to fix than hunger, especially when he has to keep restarting his healing every time he touches a new bit of slime. Still, the puddle of Charlie starts to *move* a little when he's mostly rehydrated, and it gives Tommy hope when he pulls back, needing to catch his breath. He's *dizzy*, and Tubbo drops to his knees next to him, putting an arm around him and giving him some support to stay upright .

Sapnap and Quackity are still fighting. "- *you're* the one who wanted to stay out of Las Vegas business, Sapnap, *you* said to keep everything to myself so you wouldn't have to risk reporting it-"

“You still could have said something when you knew I was looking for *him*, specifically! Hell, you could have told me after I *quit* !”

“And *you* could have told me how *fucked up* you all treated him! I *saw* what Tommy was like when he got here, when he was *starved* and-”

“I wasn’t able to help him with Dream around! If he was here, I could have-”

Charlie sits up. “Quackity from Las Nevadas, why are you arguing with Sapnap from your bedroom?”

Quackity scoffs. “Charlie, I said to stop calling him-” He freezes, and then turns to look at him. Charlie, who’s noticeably smaller than usual, but back to his normal hue and shape. “*Charlie!*” The fight already forgotten, he immediately falls to the floor, wrapping his arms around Charlie in a hug- not too tight, or he’d risk squishing him.

Charlie beams and hugs Quackity right back. “We’re hugging!”

“I thought- I thought you *died*- ” Quackity’s breath hitches, catching on tears.

“Oh, silly Quackity from Las Nevadas! I can’t die! ...except when I turn to dust, like people do!”

“You- you were *boiling*, Charlie, I-”

“I can’t think when it’s that hot!” he says happily. “I’m not a magma cube, after all!”

Quackity pulls back to just stare at him for a moment in confusion and disbelief before letting his head drop. “I just- I’m not going to ask. I’m just happy you’re okay, man.”

“I’m happy you’re happy!”

Sapnap hovers over them awkwardly. “Charlie, I, uh... I’m... sorry about-”

“Sapnap from Quackity from Las Nevadas’s bedroom! You should ask Badboyhalo-” Sapnap flinches at the name. “-from the Badlands for advice on *not* accidentally burning people with your hands! It would be very bad if you burned someone with less protective meat and bones than I have!”

“That’s not how humans work, Charlie,” Quackity mumbles tiredly.

He can’t be anywhere as tired as Tommy, though. He has to depend on Ranboo and Tubbo’s help to get to his feet. “I, uh... I think you’re all good,” Tommy says. “I don’t know. That was- that was weird to heal. Um, not as bad as regrowing limbs, worse than... worse than Withering. Don’t do that again.”

Sapnap snaps his head over to look at him again. Tommy doesn’t look back at him. “Wait, Tommy-”

“Ace, you owe me,” Tommy says. “Right?”

“Yeah- yeah, whatever you want,” Quackity says, also ignoring Sapnap. “I- thank you *so* much, I’m- sorry I didn’t- I didn’t want you two to run into each other like this, if I knew you knew Ranboo, I would have sent Sapnap away before I called-” Sapnap lets out a surprised and upset noise.

“Whatever,” Tommy says sharply. “You can pay me back by getting my *discs* from this guy. It seems like you two are on *good terms*, you can figure it out between you two, but I-”

“Wait!” Sapnap yells over him. “Wait, Tommy, I- I’ve got them here. I mean, not *here* here, but upstairs- I’ll get them.”

Tommy looks at him, startled, and they make eye contact- exactly what he was avoiding, but oh well. Sapnap looks... almost frantic, even more so than when Tommy arrived to find him standing over what was basically a *corpse*. Tommy doesn’t... understand. “...you’ll just give them back to me?”

“Yeah- yeah, of course, it shouldn’t even be your payment, they’re *yours*. ”

Wow. That’s bold to hear from *Sapnap*. “...so what, you were just keeping them from me for fun?”

Sapnap shakes his head quickly. “No! Dream was- he was going to break them. I talked him down and got them, but...”

Break them? But- they were collateral. Dream couldn’t just *break* them, not if he wanted to keep holding them over Tommy’s head-

Then again, Dream had so many other things he could hold over Tommy’s head. Affection, praise, the positive reinforcement he was desperate for. The discs were a symbol of the Syndicate, of Wilbur who kept eluding him, and more importantly, something that Tommy cared about more than he cared about Dream. He hated Tommy’s discs. And maybe- maybe if he broke them, he’d find some fucked up joy in manipulating Tommy with something that didn’t even exist anymore, in false promises of getting back the items he loved that he would *never see again*-

Tommy warbles, a miserable sound, and Quackity tenses. Sapnap just looks confused, but he takes a step back. “I’ll- get them now, you just- wait here, it’ll be like five minutes-” He runs out the door. Tommy shouldn’t trust it- even if Sapnap suggested earlier that he quit being a hero, even if he’s apparently... the *fiancé* that Tommy hadn’t met yet- he shouldn’t trust that Sapnap is just going to retrieve his discs. He’s probably calling George, or maybe the Hero Organization all together, to turn him in.

But just the idea of getting his discs back safely, of being able to bring them *home* and keep them in his bedroom, near his nest- he might cry tears of joy. He needs them. They’re *his*.

“Uh- Tommy?” Quackity asks. “Was that- are you-?”

“He’s an avian, boss man,” Tubbo answers for him. “He didn’t know until recently, but yeah.” Tommy keeps leaning against him.

“...shit,” Quackity murmurs. “Uh- Tubbo, how do you know-?”

Ranboo interrupts this time. “Oh, it turns out Tommy and Tubbo were friends in foster care.” He’s just happy to share something he remembers, the concept still a novelty to him. “And Tubbo was Tommy’s first flock member!”

Quackity eyes *him* with confusion. “...okay. You seem a little...”

“Healed his brain damage,” Tommy answers, and the circle is complete.

“...wow. Okay.” Quackity sighs. “That’s- a lot. I’m glad you’re, uh, doing okay with the Syndicate.”

“Yeah, it’s... it’s good,” he says awkwardly. It *is*- Tubbo’s there, Ranboo and Techno are there- but it’s a little uncomfortable to admit to Quackity, of all people. “So... you and Sapnap-?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Yeah, no *shit*. He’s, what, you and Karl’s other fiancé?” Quackity winces and nods. “And... you kept me showing up here a secret from him.”

“You helped Karl. I owed you more than just sending you off to the Syndicate.” Quackity stands up, Charlie following suit, though he’s about half of Quackity’s height right now. Hopefully he’ll make more slime... somehow. Tommy isn’t gonna help with that. “And Sapnap and I were having... problems, considering our professions.”

“...do you have a hero kink or someth-“

“No,” Quackity says immediately, though he’s turning red. Tubbo gags. “No! I met them when they were off duty together, it was a *coincidence*- “

“Suuure,” Tommy says, leaning on Tubbo a little more. He thinks he might fall asleep standing up if he doesn’t keep talking. “And I’m not the biggest man around.”

Tubbo pats his back. “I’m glad you’re coming to terms with it.”

Tommy chirps, as offended as he can get when he’s so tired. “Bitch!”

Quackity clears his throat, shifting awkwardly. “Anyway- it’s better now that Sapnap’s quit, there’s still a few, *ehhh*, issues-“

“Wait, didn’t you have Tech torture Gogy for you?” Quackity falls suspiciously silent, and Tommy snorts. “Fucked up.”

“Sapnap knew,” Quackity hisses. “He tried to get it out of George first and he *couldn’t*, so he let me do what I needed to as long as George didn’t get *too* hurt.”

“...double fucked up, but I respect it.” Sapnap agreeing to hurt George seems... fake. But Sapnap offering Tommy his discs back seems fake, too. Fuck, Sapnap *dating a villain* seems

fake. It's all fake! Or maybe just the Sapnap he thought he knew was.

Or maybe Tommy just always thinks the worst of everyone.

It's not long before the door slams open, Sapnap rushing through it. Tommy furrows his eyebrows- he's *human* again for some reason- but then his eyes go wide. Sapnap's *actually* holding the discs. Sapnap comes to a screeching halt in front of him, and holds them out.

It takes Tommy a second to reach out for them. He can't believe it, not really, until they're actually in his hands, and even then it still doesn't feel real. His *discs*, the first gift he ever got, the first gift from his *flock*, and he finally has them back. He *has them back*.

Tommy almost collapses. Instead, he manages to hold back his tears and just holds the discs tightly. "Thank you," he says quietly, staring down at them. He's so tired. He's feeling so *much*.

"I'm sorry, Tommy," Sapnap says back, and Tommy's head shoots back up to look at him in disbelief. But Sapnap looks... genuine. *Sadly* genuine. "I'm sorry," he repeats. "I should have tried to stop Dream. I should have gotten actually involved instead of looking the other way. And I shouldn't have teased you about stupid shit all the time, either."

He grabs onto a tiny piece of anger, just *something*, so he won't just accept it. "...you made fun of me for being so *depressed* I couldn't shower, Sap."

He winces like the sentence actually hurt him. "I didn't- I didn't realize that was what that was. I thought you were just being a gross teen, like I was. I'm sorry about that, too."

Tommy isn't used to apologies. Ranboo apologizes, but for stupid shit, like not remembering something from when his brain was fucked, or for *walking past* Tommy when he feels like he's in the way. So that doesn't really matter. Wilbur apologizes, but it's always for something he actively did, like going through his shit or fucking *borderline mind controlling him*.

This is different, sort of, because most of what Sapnap is apologizing for is... *not* doing something. For being a bystander, the same way George was, but where George still acted like Tommy *deserved* it, Sapnap... doesn't.

And where Wilbur apologizes because he doesn't want Tommy to be mad at him, Sapnap is *serious*. He's sorry because he did something *wrong*. Because he knows the good days they had weren't enough to make up for how Sapnap looked away on the bad ones. Because Tommy got hurt because he wasn't willing to fight with his friend for him.

"...Tubbo, can you...?" Tommy holds the discs out to him, and Tubbo takes them without hesitation. Tommy steps forward, facing Sapnap, who doesn't move. "I hate your fucking guts."

Sapnap tries not to let his expression change, but it does fall a little bit anyway. "Yeah, I get it--"

“But you- you were closer to being a brother to me than Dream ever was.” Sapnap freezes. “And I- I fucking *understand*, okay, I know that if, fucking, I don’t know, if Tubbo killed a baby or something I wouldn’t stop him because he’s my fucking *family* and I know- I know Dream was basically yours. Even if he was shit. Even when he was shitty to *you*. ”

“He wasn’t my-” Sapnap stops before he can lie. “He shouldn’t have been, though.”

Tommy throws his hands up. “Well, yeah, he shouldn’t have been! And he shouldn’t have been *my* brother either, but we both- we both let him do whatever the fuck he wanted, because he *was*- ”

“You were just a kid, you weren’t-”

He takes a step closer. Sapnap still doesn’t step back. “You think I don’t fucking know that, Sapnap? I know it was fucked up! *Dream* is fucked up, and he uses everybody, and he fucked me up and I *know* he fucked you up too! I’m pretty sure the only person he *didn’t* fuck up was Gogy, and that was just because he’s a simp!”

“Tommy,” Sapnap says, his voice breaking.

“It was so *bad*. Everything was awful, and I’m- you don’t even *know* how fucked up I am over it, I- I’ve got all this regular trauma and then hybrid trauma and I can’t even trust that the people I- I fucking *care about* won’t end up like Dream, that they’re not just *using me* and that they’ll change as soon as I’m trapped with them-” Tommy rubs at his eyes, because of course he can’t hold back his tears anymore. “-and fuck you, fuck you for letting him fuck me up, and *thank you* for giving me an out. Thank you for telling me I had options, even if that wasn’t really what you meant, and thank you for fucking- never making me feel like a burden the way George did, and for apologizing when you hurt me, and for- for helping me pick out my own fucking *name*. ”

“*Tommy*. ” And then Sapnap’s hugging him, and Tommy cries harder, but Sapnap is so *warm*. Not burning, like he would be if he was in his demon form, but still so warm. He wishes he’d ever gotten this at Dream’s. He wishes he’d met him under literally any other circumstances. He wishes that Sapnap could be his-

He has to stop himself. He won’t chirp. He *can’t*. Because Sapnap isn’t flock. Not now. Not when Tommy is still so screwed up. Not when Sapnap is busy figuring out his *own* shit, now that he isn’t a hero or ‘Dream’s partner’ anymore. Maybe someday. Not today.

“I’m so sorry,” Sapnap whispers. “And- I’m glad you got out. Fuck, I’m- I’m glad Dream *died*. I’m sorry.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Tommy says, hugging him back. “I hate you. Thank you.”

“Quackity from Las Nevadas,” Charlie whispers far too loudly. “I think they’re having an emotional moment.”

“...yeah, Charlie, they are,” Quackity actually whispers, but still loud enough for Tommy to hear.

“You said we’re supposed to leave people alone when they have *emotional moments*. ”

“That’s different, that was-”

Ranboo starts whispering too. “You wouldn’t actually kill a baby, would you?”

“Depends how annoying it is,” Tubbo says at regular volume.

Tommy takes the opportunity to pull back and rub at his face again, trying to get rid of the tear tracks as his crying slows. If he keeps crying all the time, he’s going to get as dehydrated as Charlie was. “You’re going to fucking make it up to me. We’re going to fucking, I don’t know, figure out a friendship or- or something, because Quackity’s basically Tubbo’s stepdad and Karl’s cool and- and I’ll be around because I’m the Syndicate’s healer.”

“You’re... what?”

“...yeah, long story.”

But Tommy will tell it to him, because they’ve taken their first step to something better. To *healing*.

Chapter End Notes

emotions, perhaps. feelings, maybe.

this might not be the confrontation you all were hoping for, but it's what tommy needed

(30 chapters, 1.5k bookmarks [including the private ones], 75k hits- you are all fucking insane. i'm so happy that people are enjoying this fic!)

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy's curled up on the couch when he hears the front door open. He knew it was coming- Phil texted him that they were on their way back just like he promised- but he's still bracing himself a little. He's got news to tell them, after all.

Techno is the first through the door, and Tommy is halfway off the couch to greet him when he realizes that he's *carrying* Fundy. He gets completely out of the way as Techno approaches, and sets Fundy down on the couch. Being out of the way doesn't last long, and Tommy immediately sidles up to Techno. "What- Phil didn't tell me something *happened*- "

"It didn't," Techno says gruffly, and Fundy winces, squeezing his eyes even more shut. Techno lowers his voice to talk further. "His power is givin' him a migraine."

Tommy immediately grabs Fundy's hand, and watches him relax as Tommy soothes the pain. It takes him a minute to really process what Techno said. "Wait- power? I didn't know he had one."

"I didn't," Fundy huffs, eyes still closed. Tommy frowns a little, but- well, Fundy's actually the right age to get powers, if not a *little* old. Tommy is the odd one out, getting his powers so young, but... it still seems kind of weird that they just... showed up out of nowhere, apparently.

Tommy doesn't stop healing him. It's strange- he keeps getting *bursts* of pain, like a new headache is developing every few seconds. What the hell is Fundy's power even doing? The time between bursts slows, and then stops just as the rest of the crew walk in, carrying their bags.

Wilbur immediately drops his, hard enough that Tommy can hear something crack inside, and he rushes over to the couch. "How are you feeling, starlight?"

"...better," Fundy says, peeking his eyes open and then starting to sit up. "Thanks, Tommy."

Tommy drops his hand, holding a bundle of cornflowers. "You, uh, want to talk about it?"

Wilbur frowns. "Give him a minute, he's had these headaches for days now-"

"Dad," Fundy says, a little sharply, and Wilbur flinches. "Don't answer for me."

"Right," Wilbur murmurs immediately, stepping back. "I'm sorry, Fundy." Oooh, *someone's* on Fundy's shitlist. Tommy was definitely, one hundred percent right about what 'eternity' costs, huh?

And after what happened a few days ago, Tommy really needs someone else to have a problem for once, just to get his mind off his own, so he pokes at Fundy a bit. "Sooo, are you

immortal now or whatever?"

Wilbur narrows his eyes, about to interrupt again, but Fundy answers before he can. "I mean, yeah. It just came with the deaths of, oh, I don't know, hundreds of people on a fucking murder island?" he says, voice getting high-pitched. "You know, like you do! And as soon as I balked at the idea of casting some- some weird, *Old Magic* that kills everyone within a few miles- I started getting horrible visions about whatever they did for my dad to *hand pick them* to get murdered!"

"Starlight," Wilbur says, trying to be soothing, but Fundy steamrolls over him.

"I had to actually do it to make the visions *stop*, and then as soon as I asked Grandpa- I don't even *remember* what I asked, but I couldn't even hear the answer because of a new vision and- it turns out! I can't turn it off! So whenever I have a question, or want to know something enough, my brain just gives me the answer, no matter how *fucked up* it is or how *horrible* of a headache it gives me!"

"We can get our hands on a power suppressor for you," Wilbur promises him. "Tommy, you'll help him until then, right?" he asks, almost begging.

"...duh." But not for Wilbur's sake, obviously. Fundy lets out another wince, and Tommy reaches out again. "Quackity has some suppressors, I think, and he owes me."

"He owes you?" Phil asks, his first words since walking into the house.

"Yeah." Tommy drops more flowers into the pile on the ground. This is going to be annoying- he doesn't even *like* cornflowers all that much, what is he supposed to do with them? "Long story short, Charlie got hurt enough for Big Q to ask for my help. Boo and Tubs popped over with me, I saved Charlie's life maybe, and now Big Q owes me a second life debt or something."

"A second-?"

Tommy perks up. "Oh, shit, wait- guess what?" He doesn't wait for them to guess. "Q actually got my discs back for me!"

The room goes quiet for a moment, other than Fundy hissing as he's afflicted with another sharp pain. Oddly, he's still the first to speak. "His- wait, his- Sapnap-?"

Oh. Fuck. Visions. "Yup! Sapnap had connections to help me get them back!" Tommy squeezes Fundy's hand hard enough to hurt, a silent *shut-up*. Fundy hears it, not saying any more. "I haven't listened to them yet, but they aren't scratched or anything, so they should be fine."

Techno lets out a quiet, annoyed noise. "Right. Good for you."

Tommy isn't going to question that- at least, not right now. Techno *should* be happy for him, but also it sounds like all four of them had a rough few days, so fine, he's in a bad mood,

whatever. What *really* matters is- “So, you old fucks have to have a record player around somewhere, right?”

“Oh- right,” Phil murmurs. “Wilbur, you have one in your room, don’t you?”

“...yeah!” Wilbur smiles, and Tommy feels... disappointed, for some reason- which isn’t right at all. He should be the opposite of disappointed, that’s good fucking news, he wants to listen to his discs, so- oh. Is *Wilbur* disappointed, and just slinging his feelings around again? Fucking dickhead. “I’ll go get it.”

He disappears down the hall, and Fundy sighs, getting to his feet. “I’m going to go to my room,” he says, and tries to let go of Tommy’s hand-

Tommy holds on a little tighter. “Wait- can’t you hang around a little longer? I wanted to- I mean, I can keep healing your headaches and shit, but I want to listen to my discs, so...”

Fundy sighs. “Thanks, but I think I’m just going to take some ibuprofen and try not to think about anything at all for a few hours. You don’t have to keep healing me.”

“I mean, okay, but- can you stick around for a song or two?” He knows it’s a weird thing to ask- maybe even sort of fucked up, considering it’s Fundy’s *dad’s* music, his dad who’s kind of on his shit list right now, but...

Okay, admitting out loud that he’s afraid of the Syndicate changing really made him face it. He knows it’s because of Dream, because of his own trauma, and that it’s not even that likely- he’s already offered to be their healer for his natural lifespan, there’s no *reason* for them to claim that they see him as family if they didn’t mean it. Not when there are a thousand other routes they could have taken- bribery, threats, blackmail... *No one’s* first choice of trick is going to be ‘offer to be family’- at least, no one except Dream trying to scam an elementary school student. No, his paranoia is just based around his own stupid fucking issues around family.

Even knowing that, he can’t trust them. It seems fucking crazy, after all- who the fuck would want *Tommy*? But he wants to trust them, and the first step is being... a little open, maybe. Letting himself be honest.

Like admitting he wants to listen to his discs, the most important things in the world to him, with all of them.

(Except maybe Wilbur, but even Tommy knows it’d be a dick move to kick only him out, especially if he’s borrowing his record player.)

Fundy *falls* back onto the couch and reaches up, clutching at his head so hard his claws dig into it. Tommy grabs him by the wrists, healing as he pulls them away- this is a bad one, painful and *long*, but when it’s over Fundy looks at him blearily. “...yeah,” he says weakly.

...man. Tommy really wants to ask what the fuck Fundy just saw. He probably doesn’t want to know.

Wilbur returns, hauling a record player that's clearly too heavy for him, and Phil goes to help carry it to the coffee table as Techno steps out of the room, holding his phone. He's probably calling Quackity about the suppressor, if Tommy had to guess, but that's barely even on his mind right now-

Tommy drops Fundy's hands and the flowers between them. "I'll grab Tubbo and Ranboo! And- the discs, fucking obviously- I'll be right back!"

He's out of the room before anyone can respond, bolting down the hall and up into the extension. Tommy doesn't hesitate to kick Tubbo's door open- it's left slightly ajar just for this reason, after all. "Tubs!"

"Hey," Tubbo greets him, not looking away from his laptop. Ranboo looks up from where he's reading on Tubbo's bed.

Tommy grabs the back of Tubbo's chair, and starts rolling it towards the door, ignoring Tubbo's annoyed shout. "C'mon- everyone's back and we're listening to the discs!" Tommy waves at Ranboo, gesturing for him to follow, and he quickly sets his book aside to do so.

"I was in the *middle* of a project-"

"It'll wait! Come *on*, I haven't been able to actually listen to them in years," Tommy says, almost bouncing as Tubbo finally gets out of the chair. He shoves the chair aside and steps into the hall, stopping in his own room to grab the items of the hour.

Ranboo hums. "Um, sorry, what are the discs again?"

"They're only the most important things in *existence*, Boo . "

Tubbo sighs and links his arm with Ranboo's. "They're records. Back before I knew who my dad was, they were the only things I had of his, and then when Tommy left our foster home I gave them to him."

"A sign of our undying friendship," Tommy says, letting out a happy chirp at the end. "Of course, it fucking turns out that *Wilbur* was Sootings, and so he's all happy that I like his music or whatever, but at the end of the day it's all about Tubbo, really."

"Okay, pretend you didn't cry the first time you heard *Jubilee Line* ."

"Fuck off and die," Tommy says cheerfully as he leads them back to the living room.

Wilbur, unfortunately, is beaming. "What was that about *Jubilee Line* ?"

"Fuck off and die," he repeats, less cheerfully, and he ignores Wilbur's face falling as he goes to put on *Your City Gave Me Asthma*.

The living room is crowded, now- there's only so much space on the couch, just enough to fit an uncomfortable Fundy on one end and Tubbo and Ranboo on the other, and there are only two armchairs- quickly claimed by Phil and Techno. It leaves Wilbur complaining when he realizes he just lost musical chairs, but Tommy hisses at him the second the first song starts.

Tommy immediately squeezes his way onto the couch as it plays, and he drops his head onto Tubbo's shoulder as they all listen.

The last time he got to listen to the discs was all the way back at the farm. Tubbo hadn't had a way to play them, and an older girl had taken it on herself to save up to buy the cheapest, crappiest record player she could find. She liked music too, anyway, and she was happy to have an excuse to get one for herself. When she left, the record player went with her, but Tommy and Tubbo had already listened to the records enough times to have their favorite songs memorized.

Then, at Dream's, there wasn't a record player. At first it was excuses- it wasn't safe for Dream to go out *just* to get Tommy a record player, they're hard to find, they're expensive- and then it was that Tommy wasn't good enough to *earn* a player. Then it was that his discs were made by a *monster*, a murderer, the thing that hurt Dream and made him come home with new wounds Tommy had to sew up, and Tommy was lucky that Dream even *let* him keep the discs.

And soon, he didn't even have that.

But he has them now. He has his discs, he has something to play them on, he has *Tubbo* - more than that, he has his *flock*.

And the three others in the room. Kind of a mixed bag of emotions on those guys. Well, Fundy's fine- Fundy's good, actually. He didn't rat out Sapnap, even though he clearly found out *something* from whatever vision he had, and he's never actually done anything wrong- besides date Dream, but then Tommy would be wrong for letting himself get adopted by Dream, which wasn't his fault, so-

Ugh. He hates thinking things through like this. Can't he just stop trying to blame himself for stupid shit so he can just move on with his day?

Anyway, Fundy's great. Phil is... unsettling. Maybe it's just that he's an avian, but it's probably more about the whole... Phil wants Tommy to be his kid thing. Because that's- *that's* fucking weird. Or it's just his bird brain, which- okay, sure, he's a bird, Tommy's a bird, he wants to adopt the bird. Cool cool cool. But *Phil* doesn't have the fucked up instinct meld thing that Tommy has. When his instincts back off, his thing for adopting Tommy should too. But Phil wasn't in his instincts when they were having their whole secret midnight meeting about whether or not they'd offer Tommy eternity.

So it's... something Tommy's struggling with. Because, as a kid, he was always a fucking *nightmare* to potential parents. They would take anyone over the loud kid who yelled and chirped and didn't have common sense. He knew how to swear and he knew how to cause problems and the only nice thing anyone could ever say about him was 'well, he takes good care of the animals'. Parents don't *want* him.

(He should have guessed something was wrong when Dream showed up and liked him right away.)

No, he shouldn't have. That's stupid. He's a kid who wanted to be loved, why would he have ever guessed what Dream was doing?

Back on topic. It's unnatural to him to think that Phil would want him to be his... son, or whatever. But he knows that's just another facet of his fucked up childhood getting to him, and it *shouldn't* be unnatural- but knowing it's wrong doesn't make it easier to get past. So, Phil is another person that's just hard to handle.

And Wilbur. Fucking *Wilbur*.

Tommy peeks his eyes open, and for just a *moment* he catches Wilbur staring at him. Wilbur, with unrestrained joy on his face as he watches Tommy listen to *his* music. Almost as fast as he's been caught, Wilbur is looking in another direction, pretending to all the world that it never happened.

Back when he first got here, after Wilbur stole his shit, Tommy tried to ignore him. Still, it was impossible to ignore the way Wilbur played his music with his bedroom door just a *little* cracked, enough for the music to make its way to the living room. Tommy would follow the trail of sound, standing in the hall to listen to it at its clearest, all the while coming up with excuses in his head in case someone caught him.

It was familiar, even if he didn't know all the songs Wilbur played. The music reminded him of Tubbo, even if the memory of his lost friend hurt him at the time, and it filled him with a sense of longing he desperately tried to shove down. Still, he listened anyway.

And he's listening now, because the music Wilbur makes- it's important to him. He doesn't want it to be, not now that he knows who Sootings is, not when Wilbur has betrayed him over and over-

"I love you, sunflower. I promised you'd be safe and happy here, remember?"

...it's not fair to call that a betrayal. Tommy just didn't want to hear it, and it *hurt*, after Wilbur swore he just wanted to make Tommy happy, that he'd still say something that scared him. But Wilbur didn't know. He didn't fucking *get it*. And it's not his fault, it's Tommy's, for being so fucked up. And if he wasn't-

If he wasn't, wouldn't that have been *nice*?

Wouldn't he have been happy? 'I love you's, from someone claiming to be like family, like *brothers*, wouldn't it be nice? It's not like Dream ever said it. Fuck, he's not even sure if *Tubbo* has ever said it so blatantly, even though he knows Tubbo loves him as much as Tommy loves him back.

I love you. It's literally three words. Why is it terrifying to hear?

How does he make it *stop* being terrifying?

He wants- he's trying, isn't he? He's trying to accept what they've said to him. What Wilbur said, that's a part of it, so he has to accept it, so he has to stop being *scared*. He has to. He *has*

to. It's just... easier said than done.

It shouldn't be as hard as talking to Sapnap. It's definitely going to be harder.

Tommy glances at him again. This time, when Wilbur looks away, Tommy doesn't, and their eyes meet again.

He's going to have to do it.

But later. After the last song has played out.

Chapter End Notes

everyone's a lil grumpy they didn't get to kill pandas for tommy

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

WARNING: this chapter is about an attempt to self-harm (not mental health related). there will be a summary in the end notes

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The thing about Tommy saying he'll talk to Wilbur after the last song plays out... is that all of time comes after the last song plays out.

He didn't promise he'd talk to Wilbur right away, after all. After the song plays out there's tomorrow, then the next day, and the next week, even. He could wait a year, if he wanted, actually! Because it's always after the last song!

It gives Tommy a good excuse to push it off. To ignore Wilbur's prodding, ignore the faint feelings of *hope* or *hurt* when Tommy reacts one way or another. They're never alone together. The house is fuller, busier, and there's no chance for it- Tommy is always with Fundy until Quackity manages to get the suppressor over, then Techno starts teaching him *glasswork* as he makes Tommy a *brewing station* for his future potion lessons, and then and then and then-

It's been a week since he last healed Fundy and the pain is back.

Healing Charlie was important, but it was also so draining. It was a strain, pushing past his usual limits in a weird way, and then after healing Fundy constantly for days... the itch came on fast, then the pain set in, and it's driving him *crazy*.

He can't starve himself, Techno cooks for him whenever he so much as *suggests* being hungry. Can't avoid sleeping when his flock sleeps with him in his nest half the time. Ranboo hasn't been crying, Tubbo hasn't blown himself up with redstone, no one is getting *hurt*.

It's a good thing, but he feels like his powers are scratching at his *bones*.

It's deep and horrible and every movement is tainted by the pull of his powers as they demand to be used. It's sharp but still horribly constant, and it only gets worse. It's only been a week. It's only been a *week*.

It wakes him in the middle of the night, and he crawls out of bed, away from Ranboo and Tubbo. They've been worried about him since the pain started to kick in, when he became more withdrawn to try to hide it. He refuses to acknowledge their concern, but they've been sticking especially close by, and they both fell asleep in the nest last night. It soothes him to see them safe in the nest, helps him ignore the desperate scratching hidden under his skin, but not for long.

He needs something. He needs to heal.

Tommy wants Techno to take him out again. To watch him carve bits and pieces off of someone, so Tommy can sew them back together and watch it happen again and again. He wants to find someone burning to death and run his hands over bubbling skin. He wants blood and gore and *whatever it takes to make this stop*.

There's a knife in the kitchen. The same knife Wilbur used to carve up his own arm, he thinks, though it's not like he'd know for sure. He was pretty distracted at the time, after all- because Wilbur hurt himself for *Tommy's* sake.

When Wilbur picked up the knife, Tommy was suddenly right back in Dream's apartment. Dream never deliberately cut into him like that, but it wasn't uncommon for him to just *happen* to be holding something sharp when Tommy was bad. And Tommy was being bad *now*, Techno had told him not to starve himself, but he did anyway so the pain wouldn't come back and Wilbur had the knife and it was going to *hurt*-

And Wilbur dragged it along his own skin, the blood beading up, and for a long moment Tommy just stared, because... why would he do that? Why would he hurt himself just because Tommy needed to heal? But Wilbur dropped the knife, and a poppy bloomed under Tommy's hand, and his powers settled under his skin.

Wilbur isn't here now. But Tommy and the knife are. He picks it up, hand shaking slightly as he holds it to his arm, the same place Wilbur had cut on himself. He doesn't *want* to do this- he doesn't want to hurt- and part of him might laugh, later, at how he's doing this alone, in the dead of the night, like a wrong'un hiding a crime, but right now he just needs it to stop.

"*Stop,*" a voice comes from behind him, and-

It's fear like he's never felt before, worse than the constant dread of being betrayed, worse than the first time Wilbur called him his brother, worse than Dream threatening to kill him and revive him until he broke and finally obeyed him. It's fear like he's dying, like he's already dead. He would scream if he could breathe, but he can't, his lungs frozen and he's frozen and maybe he is dead, maybe this is all there is and it is unending and he will never be free, always terrified beyond words, maybe this is eternity-

Tommy gasps for air when it recedes, warbling involuntarily as soon as he physically can, *flock-help-scared-scared-HELP*.

You're safe, I'm here, flock sings back, and he chirps desperately, almost flailing as he reaches out- his hands are empty, the knife gone somehow- but hands take his and he's pulled in close, arms wrapping around him. His heart pounds as the terror slowly fades, and he grabs at whatever pieces of awareness he can find.

He's on the ground. He's shaking too much to stand- did he collapse? He's being held, *safe, safe like the nest*. He chirps again, and again, *flock-flock-flock*, and the arms hold him tighter.

Safe, safe, safe, flock sings again, and he goes boneless as he feels so much- *too much*-

Relief and joy and comfort and fear and fear and *fear* and wonder and he can't breathe again, his brain is screaming at the assault of feelings that aren't *his*-

Help, he warbles again, and it stops.

Everything stops.

Tommy is on the ground. He's shaking too much to stand. He's being held.

It's quiet, except for his own sobbing breaths, except for someone else's shaky breathing. The floor is cold, cold enough to feel even through his jeans. The pain still claws at him, still rips at his insides, but it's *nothing* compared to what he just felt.

"Sunflower," flock holding him says, sounding close to tears. "I'm so *sorry*." Wilbur needs to stop apologizing to him-

Oh fuck.

Tommy forces his eyes open, and it's exactly what he thought. *Wilbur* is the flock holding him, keeping him safe, keeping him safe from *himself*. It was his powers that made Tommy so fucking terrified, it was *him*, and now-

And now Tommy is clinging to him back, the horrible bird part of his brain calling Wilbur *safe*, because Tommy was so scared the bird drowned him out and now he's-

He's-

"You- you son of a *bitch*," he chokes out, tightening his grip on Wilbur's sweater. "You, you just- you-"

"You were going to hurt yourself, Tommy, I didn't- I didn't *mean* to," Wilbur lets out a miserable warble in return, and Tommy almost chirps to soothe him *back*, like he wants to calm him down, like-

He's going to kill him. He's going to *kill him*.

"You were about to cut yourself, I was just trying to stop you, I didn't mean to share my fear-"

Tommy freezes, and Wilbur coos, *you're safe you're safe*, but-

That wasn't Wilbur's fear. Why would Wilbur be so scared? *How* could Wilbur be so scared, how could *anyone*? It was so overwhelming, so devastating, how could any living being feel that without immediately breaking down?

But Wilbur *is* breaking down. He holds Tommy so tight, like he's precious, like he'll disappear if Wilbur lets go. He rocks them both back and forth, cooing and chirping whatever comforts he can get through his own obvious panic. Because Tommy scared him.

Because Tommy hurting himself scared him.

Tommy takes a shaking breath, and then another. He feels like he's going to pass out. "I- my powers," he whispers. "It hurts, I wanted to- like you did. Just enough to heal, to- to make it hurt less."

Wilbur warbles again, *I'm scared*, and Tommy-

Something small and dark in Tommy rears its head. "Just a little," he continues. "It *hurts*, Wilbur, I was just going to cut a little, it wouldn't have been *too* deep." Wilbur *trembles*, and Tommy ducks down, hiding his face in Wilbur's shoulder. "Just a small cut, a little blood, I wouldn't *die*- "

Wilbur chirps in a way that Tommy has only heard from himself. *Flock*, it sings, but it's followed with *don't die don't be hurt flock be safe flock I love you-*

If Wilbur is going to fuck Tommy up like this, then Tommy can do the same right back.

(He was supposed to be better, wasn't he? He was figuring out his feelings, he was picking apart his traumas, he was *recovering*- but he needed more time to fix things with Wilbur, and Wilbur *took that from him* by terrorizing him, by making him so scared and desperate he claimed Wilbur as flock. This isn't healthy, it's not how it was supposed to go-

But right now, he doesn't care.)

I'm safe, Tommy chirps back. *We're safe*.

It's a long while before Wilbur comes back to himself, his instincts withdrawing. Even when the warbles and chirps stop, though, he doesn't let go, not yet. "Tommy," he says, his voice raw. "Why- why didn't you tell anyone? We- we would fix it, we'd get you someone to heal, why would you-"

Tommy keeps resting his head on Wilbur's shoulder. "It's dumb," he mumbles.

"It's not *dumb*, it's important-"

"No," he interrupts. "My reason's dumb. I just..." Tommy lets it trail off, Wilbur's question unanswered.

Wilbur's sacrifice kept coming to mind. His willingness to hurt himself just to soothe Tommy's pains. No one's ever done something like that before, especially not when he didn't even ask for it.

And now it'd feel *pathetic* to ask for it. Even if Techno probably would cut himself for Tommy, even if Ranboo could easily be brought to tears that would burn his face, it wouldn't be genuine. Not like Wilbur did.

He hates Wilbur, because Wilbur makes him *want*.

He wants someone who wants him. Someone willing to make sacrifices for him. Someone who looked at him the moment they met and wanted him, *genuinely* wanted him, who

watched him through his worst moments of fear and rage and still thought him worthy of being *family*.

Of being his brother.

He wants to erase Dream from his mind. He wants someone to fill the gap Dream left, and he knows Wilbur would fit in so easily, so much *better*. A brother, one that was always there for him, even before they *met*, when Tommy only knew his voice singing ‘ *Shout at the wall, ‘cause the walls don’t fucking love you-* ’

He *wants* so badly. He’s greedy, Dream told him whenever he wanted something, but now it feels like greed is good because Wilbur *would* give him what he wanted. Wilbur would be his brother. He’ll hold him like this, he’ll sing, he’ll *love* Tommy, he’ll give Tommy the fucking *world*, he thinks, and-

Even now, Wilbur reaches for the knife, and he digs it into his own leg, and poppies bloom under Tommy’s hands as his flock’s blood spills onto the kitchen floor.

And he *laughs* with relief as his pain and Wilbur’s fade together.

Chapter End Notes

summary: Tommy has put off talking to Wilbur, and, unrelated, he hasn't told anyone about how the pain from not using his powers is back. It hurts so bad that, in the middle of the night, he sneaks off to hurt himself in the kitchen just to be able to heal himself. Wilbur catches him before he can, and accidentally overwhelms him with fear- it's so overwhelming that Tommy calls out for flock, and when Wilbur answers, Tommy accidentally claims him as his own flock. Tommy is furious when he realizes, and manages to deliberately upset Wilbur into doing the same back. Tommy admits, only to himself, that he hates Wilbur because Wilbur makes him WANT a brother to replace Dream. He's actually considering it.

Wilbur: I follow you into the kitchen at night wyd

Tommy: cutting my arm in front of you to forever change our bond and the trajectory of our lives

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy isn't surprised when someone enters the kitchen. In fact, he's more surprised that no one came earlier- he's sure the chirping and warbling wasn't too quiet to be heard from the bedrooms. Still, they must be a fucking sight.

Wilbur isn't bleeding anymore, but his pants are splattered with a dark red, and there's a small puddle of blood underneath him. The knife has been tossed aside, no longer needed, and his stained hands have returned to holding Tommy close.

And Tommy's letting him, which is probably even weirder.

BABY! a screech comes from the door, and Tommy idly rolls his head to look. Phil is frozen, his wings spread too wide to even fit through the door. He looks terrified.

Safe, don't worry, Tommy chirps back tiredly, and he starts to pull away from Wilbur- or he tries, anyway. Wilbur refuses to let go of him.

"It's- I'm fine," Wilbur tries to reassure Phil. "Little- little accident in the kitchen, but Tommy fixed me right up." Tommy hums in agreement. Phil doesn't need to know more than that.

The reassurance is at least enough for Phil to lower his wings, though he immediately rushes to their sides, kneeling down in the blood. "What happened? How did you get hurt- were you stabbed in the *leg*? What *happened*-"

Tired, be quiet, Tommy twitters in complaint, and Phil listens. "Couldn't sleep, startled Wil, 's fine now. Fuck off." He leans into Wilbur even more, his instincts displeased with having another avian around his flock- and Tommy's human brain almost equally annoyed.

It's too quiet, actually, and when he glances up, Phil is eyeing him with concern. "You're... communicating more," he says curiously, not quite a question. "Or more effectively, at least. How did you learn that?"

"Learn what?"

"...well, I guess you wouldn't notice it," Phil hums. "You're... I guess you could say you're speaking avian a little more fluently. That's a bit of a simplification, really, since it's meant to be ingrained into your instincts, but- well, you normally chirp a little more, ah..."

"Like a little baby bird," Wilbur jokes weakly, his voice strained from before. "You chirp like a toddler demanding whatever it wants."

"Well, you *did*," Phil quickly corrects. "Now it's more like... speaking full sentences."

Tommy looks between them both. "...well, what the fuck does *that* mean?"

Wilbur grins at him, not holding back his excitement in the slightest. "If I had to *guess*, in my ultimate wisdom-

"Oh, shush, mate."

"-it's probably because you've matured. Awww, my sunflower is growing up-"

Tommy hisses at him- if birds can swear, there's a swear in there somewhere. "What, just fucking out of nowhere? Like a Pokemon evolution?"

"Like a what?" Phil asks. Wilbur seems a little lost, too.

"...fucking ancient, both of you. *What*, I just became an adult bird out of nowhere? Nothing fucking *happened*- "

"Well," Wilbur says, voice too smug, and Tommy is about to hiss again but he's a second too late. "You *did* let an avian into your flock. Maybe your instincts are content that you're spending time with your own kind instead of-

"Fuck off and die," Tommy forcefully drags himself out of Wilbur's arms, ignoring how his flock huffs at it. "I'm going to strangle my fucking *brain* if it keeps pulling weird shit like this."

"You what?" Phil asks quietly before turning to look at Wilbur. "He *what*?"

Wilbur smirks, annoyingly proud of himself. He shouldn't be, considering what a *mess* he just was, and it puts Tommy a little on edge. "I'm the favorite now!"

"No the fuck you are *not*, " Tommy snaps at him. "Rankings of my flock-" He holds a hand up as high as he can. "Tubbo." He puts it a tad lower. "Everyone else." He touches the ground. "You. Bitch."

"...I'm the favorite," Wilbur insists to Phil.

Phil just looks... upset? Which Tommy still does not fucking care for. "But- I thought-" He cuts himself off with a deep breath. "Right. Well. I'm happy for you two."

"Awww," Wilbur teases lightheartedly. "Are you jealous, Phil?" Tommy snorts, amused, but quickly realizes- Wilbur isn't actually joking.

Phil isn't even denying it. He's just trying to change the subject. "Are you sure your leg is alright, Wil? You didn't lose too much blood?" Wilbur answers him easily, obviously appeasing him, but Tommy isn't really listening.

It's a little fucked up, maybe, to be happy that someone's jealous over him. That Phil is *upset* that Tommy's letting other people into his flock instead of him. Then again, it's more fucked up that he just forced Wilbur's instincts into recognizing him as flock, but y'know what, Wilbur deserved that, so fuck it.

But Phil. Phil, the fucking Angel of Death. Phil, the total soft-hearted loser who apparently saw Tommy as a fledgling before they even realized Tommy was a bird. Phil, who's jealous over his own *kids* because he wants to be in Tommy's flock. Or for Tommy to join his? He's not sure how merging flocks works. Or if it does at all. Is Wilbur a part of two flocks now? Or did Tommy just steal him like he did Techno?

Whatever, he'll figure that out later.

Anyway. Does he *want* Phil in his flock? His instincts don't, he thinks- he doesn't like having other avians around. He only accepted Wilbur because he was terrified and didn't know what was happening, it wasn't something he or the bird brain wanted. Still, is it kind of a dick move to leave Phil out?

And is it wrong if he wants to leave things like this so he'll keep feeling wanted?

Phil doesn't want a healer the same way Dream did, the way Wilbur does. At least, Tommy doesn't think so. Phil wanted a healer to make Wilbur happy, but it wasn't all-encompassing. This, Phil being jealous over *flock*, it's different- it's about *Tommy*. Who Tommy is.

It's impossible to believe. He wants to so badly. But he also wants to push it, wants to make this last, to feel *important* because of himself and not his powers. So, he'll just... let things stay as they are for now. For just a bit.

Fundy stumbles through the door to the kitchen tiredly before freezing in place- Phil has knelt down, checking on Wilbur, and the blood is still everywhere, and Tommy is just staring into space, so this is probably a sight. "Uh. Did I... miss something?"

Well, Tommy can leave things where they are with *Phil*. He raises a hand, pointing at Fundy. "You. Get over here."

Fundy blinks, pointing at himself in confusion, and, when Tommy nods, he slowly approaches. The avians in the room are quiet and curious, at least until Tommy shifts to his feet and fucking tackles him with all the energy he can muster. Fundy yelps, terrified-

And Tommy *chirps*.

It's easy this time, like with Ranboo, letting someone into his flock not because he's scared or overwhelmed, but because he wants them there. And he does want Fundy in his flock.

Fundy's... nice, in a weird way, in an honest way. He's an odd one out, the way Tommy is, even though he's been here his whole life and Tommy is so new- but it's fine. If Fundy's in his flock, then he's not *out*. He's one of them.

Plus, he made fucking *Minecraft*.

And also it makes Phil even more upset, more jealous. "You- wh- he's a *fox*, Tommy, that's-" He cuts himself off, taking another deep breath. "Alright. Why don't you all clear out of the kitchen, and I'll clean the floor." It's not really a question.

He's tempted to push it further, and he almost does, but he's still tired- healing may not exhaust him, but he still hasn't slept yet. Wilbur grabs both him and Fundy and drags them out of the living room. He's almost *vibrating* with energy. "Sunflower-"

"What- was that?" Fundy asks. "Well, I mean- I... guess I know, but I don't know? I, uh-"

Tommy slaps his back, hard enough to make him stumble. "You're flock now, bitch. So's your dad, actually, even though he sucks and I didn't want him to be." Wilbur lets out a hurt noise, and Tommy ignores it, even as his instincts flare up- *don't let flock be sad why did you upset flock make it better-*

"I'm- what?" Fundy sounds even more confused and suddenly-

Suddenly Tommy's scared again. Not like earlier, when Wilbur fucking ruined him and he thought he was dying, but- scared like he has been before. When he realized he wasn't good enough for Dream or his friends, when he thought that no one cared about him, like-

Like Fundy doesn't want to be his flock?

How did he not think of that? Why didn't he consider it? Why would Fundy *want* to be his flock, anyway- Tommy thought it'd be weird because Fundy is Dream's ex, but it's got to be weirder for Fundy, to be flock with his ex's little brother. Of course he wouldn't want to, of course Tommy isn't good enough to overcome that, why did Tommy just *make himself get attached to someone who doesn't care about him-*

Help, he chirps, and without thinking, he takes a step closer to Wilbur. To safety, to comfort, to his *flock-*

His flock that he stole. That he played victim to, so an already-scared Wilbur would slip deeper into his instincts, so he'd be *forced* to see Tommy as flock. Tommy's so selfish, so self-absorbed, so-

'You're greedy, Theo. You don't appreciate what anyone does for you.'

"I'm sorry," Tommy whispers.

"...what?" This time it's Wilbur who speaks up, but Tommy doesn't know how to answer that.

'You should be grateful. You have a safe home-'

A house in the middle of the woods, where no one can get to him.

'-people that feed you, make sure you have what you need-'

Techno bringing him meals, Phil buying him clothes and furniture and nesting materials.

'-and you still want more, all the time! I'm- I'm working so hard to make sure you have a good life, I get hurt every fucking day!'

Wilbur slicing his arm open, stabbing his leg, just for Tommy's sake.

'You're greedy. You're insatiable. Can't you just shut up and appreciate what people do for you?'

"Tommy?" Fundy asks, quiet, still *confused*. "I didn't- I wasn't trying to say it's-?"

"I'm sorry," Tommy says again, squeezing his eyes shut. That's not a good enough apology. Dream would never accept it. He needs to do better. Something is hitting the door, someone is talking, but he can't focus on anything but apologizing right. "I'm- sorry for being, uh. Being self-absorbed and- and greedy, I'll work on it, I'm sorry I can't- I can't take back what I've already- I'm sorry."

It was too much stuttering, too hesitant, that's not a good enough apology either-

'You don't even mean it! You just want to get out of trouble. Gods, Theo, what would it take to make you actually sorry for your actions?'

"I'm sorry," he repeats as arms wrap around him. He barely feels them. "I'm sorry."

Distantly, he's aware that Wilbur is chirping, holding him, trying to comfort him, but- it's Fundy he's apologizing to. It's Fundy who needs to accept his pathetic excuse for an apology... or not. Probably not. God, Tommy fucked up.

Fundy is just staring back at him, looking almost... alarmed, for some reason. "I... don't know, uh..." Tommy doesn't notice for a moment too long that Fundy is playing with his power suppressor- not until Fundy slips it off and pockets it.

Almost immediately, Fundy's knees buckle, and Wilbur almost shoves Tommy out of his arms to catch Fundy before he can hit the floor. It makes Tommy wince, but he gets it. He's only a few steps behind as he reaches out to take Fundy's arm and start healing yet again. The waves of pain come fast and hard, Fundy almost bending in half as he claws at his head. Tommy-

He doesn't know why Fundy did this. He wanted to know something, obviously, but- it's obviously not worth it. Tommy doesn't fucking *get it*, and he needs to, he needs to know what Fundy's thinking so he knows how to handle it, how to apologize *right* so he won't get *hurt*.

Wait.

When did he start thinking that *Fundy* would hurt him?

Why would Fundy hurt him? Even if Tommy pissed him off by making him flock- which only affects Tommy, not Fundy in *any* way- Fundy's never been violent. Not towards him, not at all! He's the member of his family that's the *least* likely to even raise a hand towards Tommy, let alone actually hurt him-

Oh. Tommy's just freaking out again.

It's fucking *humiliating* when the realization sets in. He was doing better, wasn't he? He was accepting help from his flock, he was trying to trust that the Syndicate wasn't trying to use him, but Fundy finds it weird for a *second* that Tommy made him flock and Tommy immediately fucking *spiraled*. Is he backsliding? Is he just too fucking tired to handle his own emotions? He has no fucking clue, but did he really have to embarrass himself in front of the both of them like that?

Cringe.

"Fundy, put the- put it back on," Tommy mumbles. "Sorry, I just- I freaked out for a second, 's fine now, put it back on you don't need to-"

Fundy just digs his claws in further, enough that Tommy will have to heal that too, before the pain finally wanes and Tommy can heal him completely. Fundy's hands drop to his lap, and he looks up at Tommy, looking... almost blank. "We're flock," he says simply.

...Tommy doesn't know how to respond to that. "Uh. I mean, I- see you as flock, but you don't have to..."

"We're *flock*," Fundy says again as he fishes out the power suppressor. "Dad?"

"Yes, starlight?" Wilbur asks worriedly, still holding Fundy upright.

"Can you ask Grandpa to go make, uh, I think blueberry pancakes."

Wilbur immediately gets to his feet. "Of course- whatever you want-" he's out the door in an instant.

As soon as he's gone, Fundy turns back to Tommy, fidgeting with the power suppressor again. "Tommy- I just saw, uh, a lot of things." Ah. Fuck. "Cl- Dream being... awful, and-"

"I don't wanna know," Tommy cuts him off, his voice going higher than he'd like. He clears his throat. "I don't- I don't want to know what you saw. I mean, it's- fuck. I'm fine now, right, I'm-"

"-and I saw what you did to Dad." Tommy freezes. "You- you messed with his instincts, right? You-"

"I'm- sorry," Tommy tries to interrupt again, but Fundy keeps talking over him.

"-you tried to make him imprint, and- you know he wanted to do the same to you, right?"

Tommy blinks at that. "What?"

"He-" Fundy sighs. "Dad wanted to be your flock. He would have done that whether you... did that or not. If you didn't imprint on him, he would... I think he'd really try to find a way to make you."

Well. That's... it's not fair to call it horrifying, since he already did it to Wilbur. At least, not unless he accepts that what he did was horrifying. But if Wilbur wanted to be flock anyway-

which Tommy *kind of* knows he did, even if it's hard to believe- it's... fine. And it's too late to worry about what Wilbur would have or wouldn't have done.

"And- look," Fundy continues. "You feel bad about that, and... Uncle Techno, right? And now because you made me flock, too. But... I don't mind. I just needed a minute to... process what you were saying, I guess, but I didn't mean to make you- we're flock. I'm happy you see me that way, honestly. I kind of thought I'd be, uh... the last one, if anything, so..."

Tommy swallows hard, trying not to get too emotional. "I didn't- you act like you're the odd one out in your family. You're not, and I just- I didn't want you to think that you're- if." He hesitates. "If this is... if this will be my family too, someday-" Fundy's eyes go wide. "-then you're part of it. An important part of it. Plus, I like you better than Wilbur anyway, so I shouldn't have let him be flock before you."

"...oh," Fundy says faintly, but they're interrupted before the conversation can continue.

"Phil was already making-" Wilbur stops in the doorway. "Am I intruding?" He doesn't seem inclined to *stop* intruding, from the way he hovers in the doorway.

Fundy is equally disinclined to continue, apparently. "Making what?" he asks, voice still faint, as he starts to get to his feet.

"Waffles and hash browns," Wilbur says after a long moment, staring at Fundy. "Is- everything alright? You feel-"

"Dad," Fundy says, a little sharply, and Wilbur frowns, but drops it. He heads back to the kitchen, and Fundy follows, but Tommy stays on the ground a little longer.

He said it.

'This will be my family too, someday.'

He *said* it. He doesn't- he isn't scared. He isn't freaking out. He thought that maybe, *maybe*, he could one day let himself see the Syndicate as *family*, and- and he's okay. Tommy's *okay*. He takes a deep breath, letting it out slowly, and then again. His chest isn't tight, he isn't shaking, he's just... thinking about having a family, and he's *okay* with it.

He must be pretty exhausted to not have the energy to freak out.

Or he's just *relieved*. Wilbur wanted to be his flock, Fundy is okay with it too, he has Techno and Tubbo and Ranboo-

All that's left is Phil. But that's not a problem for today, Tommy thinks as he gets to his feet. He's going to eat some waffles, he's going to go back to bed, and then when he's well-rested... *then* he'll think about what to do with Phil. Where he wants to take this.

Is Phil going to be his dad? Does Tommy want that? Does he even want Phil, or is he just completing the set? Does that even matter, when he'll have-?

He'll have all of time to know him. To know *all* of them. If he accepts their offer, if he accepts being their *family*, he'll have forever. Forever to come to terms with the way they care about him, forever to learn skills from Techno and listen to Wilbur sing, to play games with Fundy and make fun of Phil.

Eternity.

Tommy doesn't think he's ever looked forward to the future before. But now? He thinks he can actually see it, and he wants nothing more than to grab it and never let go. A future he can pick for himself.

He's making his choice.

Chapter End Notes

tommy: might fuck around and adopt someone else into my flock. which of you is it gonna be

phil: shouldn't it be me?

tommy, pointing at fundy: You. Come closer.

okay so this chapter was a NIGHTMARE to write. not bc of the contents, but because i am incredibly burned out from my job (it's busy, and they've started scheduling me five days straight at a time....), and because i also went on an incredibly draining road trip recently. i don't want to disappear without a word again, so i'm gonna say that i'm taking about a two week hiatus, and i MEAN it this time. i will not post a chapter in three days again like last time i tried to take one. bare minimum, i'll post in a week at the earliest, but i'll probably take the full two weeks to relax.

i hope you enjoyed this chapter! for the record, we ARE getting close to the end!

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Potion ingredients and empty bottles line Techno's cabinet, and Tommy cocks his head as he looks through it. "What am I looking for again, big man?"

"Nether wart, golden carrots, and fermented spider eyes. It's all labeled," Techno answers as he hauls Tommy's brand new *gilded* brewing stand to his desk. He's in a weirdly good mood, for him. "Also grab three empty bottles. Do *not* carry everythin' all at once, you'll drop them."

Tommy grumbles, but makes multiple trips to bring the bottles and jars to the desk. He's pretty sure most of this shit is expensive or hard to get, so he's not gonna mess around. Too much. "So... there's a lot of types of potions, right? What are you gonna make with this?" He picks up the jar of fermented spider eyes, swirling it around and watching the bulging, mutated orbs rotate. "...this is gonna be nasty, isn't it."

"Can't even taste them," Techno promises, though it might be a lie. He picks up the bottles and fills them with water from a large jug. "Here's the first step- you're gonna be *infusin'* the potion, not just mixin' the raw ingredients together, so the bottles need to be filled with water. That's universal, every potion needs that."

Tommy hums and watches as Techno pulls out a bright yellow powder, filling the center of the brewing stand with it. With a twist of a knob, the powder sparks and starts a fire beneath the potions. "You still didn't say what you're making."

"Somethin' you'll find fun. The second step of potions- nether wart." Techno gestures to the container, and Tommy pops open the lid. Techno uses tweezers to pull out a piece and put it into the top of the stand. The blaze powder *melts* it, and it slowly drips into the tubes below. "Every potion except Weakness uses this."

"Weakness?" Tommy's knowledge of potions is near zero. Heroes can sometimes use Healing potions, he knows, but Dream didn't have to, so he doesn't think he's even seen one. Besides that, he's got nothing.

Techno looks at him for a moment before realizing what he's asking. "Oh, uh... Weakness does what it sounds like. Makes you weaker. Toss it at someone and they won't be able to stand. It also works as an extreme painkiller, at the cost of not bein' able to move for a few minutes."

Tommy just hums. "Okay, so we're *not* making that one."

"No, we're not." The brewing stand bubbles as the last of the melted nether wart drains. "Next, we take our first ingredient- in this case, golden carrots." That goes into the top of the

brewing stand as well, and Tommy crinkles up his nose in disgust as it *also* starts to melt and drip into the potions. There's no way this isn't going to be nasty.

"Shouldn't carrots be more solid than that?" he asks, and Techno chuckles.

"It's the blaze powder, mostly. You'll get used to it." Techno straightens one of the tubes, and the melted gold dribbles faster. "Now, *this* will turn it into a potion of Night Vision. Perfect sight even in the darkest areas."

...he's never been so disappointed in his *life*. "What, that's what I'm supposed to find fun? Well- I guess I could freak out Wilbur in the middle of the night..." Not that he hasn't done that enough, recently.

"You're forgettin' about this." He holds up the jar of fermented spider eyes. "These corrupt potions."

"...the fuck do you mean, *corrupt*?"

"It'll change the effect of most potions. Healin' becomes Harmin', Swiftiness becomes Slowness..." When the last of the golden carrot is gone, Techno drops in the spider eye. "Or in this case? Night Vision becomes *Invisibility*."

Tommy stares at him, and then down at the potion. Fuck scaring Wilbur. He's going to freak Sapnap out so bad he burns down the whole casino. "You're *kidding* me. So what, like-?"

"It only lasts three minutes," Techno warns. "Up to eight, if you add some redstone at the end of brewin' it. I've been tryin' to find some alternate solutions to extend the duration, but... new magic isn't exactly my forte. I stick to the old stuff."

Tommy frowns, eyeing the brewing stand again. "Wait, this is new magic?"

Techno pauses, looking at him. "...what did you think potions were?"

He immediately bristles. "How the fuck should I know? It's not like it came up in my homeschooling! Dream was never like 'here, have an extensive textbook on *magic*,' he was just like 'go learn some math and don't touch my magic shit mimimimimi I'm a bitch'. And he said it exactly like that." Tommy crosses his arms and scrunches into himself.

Techno chuffs at him, and Tommy almost immediately relaxes a bit. "Right, right. Yes, potions are new magic. A sacrifice of a few items and you get an effect, but it's short-lived. With Old Magic, it'd be more like... you could turn invisible at the price of never turning back, or somethin' along those lines." He shrugs. "I was never interested enough in it to look into the topic until potions became a bit more common knowledge."

"Right. Because you were a bit too busy with *wood carving* to look into fucking *magic*. Sure."

"Actually, that was durin' my embroidery phase." He says it with a straight face, and Tommy can't tell if he's joking or if he just honestly doesn't find it embarrassing.

And good for him if it's true. That's some big man shit right there. "...add that on the list of shit you're teaching me."

Techno's expression cracks into a smile, but he quickly turns to face the brewing stand again to hide it. Tommy's about to call him out, but Techno twists the knob, turning off the brewing stand. He picks up one of the bottles, the shimmery gray potion inside swirling as he does. Techno hands it over before collecting the other two. "You can do whatever you want with that. Just try not to give Phil a heart attack."

Tommy grumbles and trails after Techno as he takes the other potions to a locked cabinet. When he's opened it, it's *full* of potions, organized by color- or probably by effect, actually. "Holy *shit*. Are you prepping for war, big man?"

"I like to be prepared," Techno says. "And they don't go bad." He adds the Invisibility potions to their brethren.

But there's *so* much more in there, more than Tommy can recognize. He leans forward to get a better look. He realizes there are small labels, and he squints to read them- Fire Res, Strength II, Poison+- he's never heard of most of these. It's *wild*.

...what could he do with all this at his disposal? "Big man, we've got a lot of lessons ahead."

Techno hums, a copy of Tommy's from earlier. "Sounds good." He stands in front of the cabinet, looking over the contents for a long while. "...Theseus."

"Yeah?"

"Did you, uh. I know everythin's been... a lot, since the holidays, but. Did you ever think more about... what we offered you?"

Tommy tries not to grimace. He's thought about it, yeah. He thinks he's decided. No, he *has* decided, it's just- he doesn't want to say it out loud. Not when he might change his mind before going through with it. Not when, despite everything he tells himself, the thought of being *immortal* terrifies him because, if things ever went wrong, if he became too annoying for them or if they decided they only wanted him for his powers-

He'd never be able to get away. Not really. Even if he ran, it'd only be so long until they found him. Even if 'so long' was decades, they'd still find him eventually if they wanted, because they'd have *forever* to do so. It would literally always be hanging over his head.

So it's terrifying to think about putting himself in that situation.

"A little bit," he says, staring down at the Invisibility potion in his hand.

"...do you. Want to talk about it?"

Tommy grumbles and sets the potion down on a nearby surface. "I want to say yes. I guess. It's just-" he groans. "I *know* it's fine. I know it, right? It's not- it's just-" He takes a second to collect himself. "I want to believe you guys won't... change. Like Dream did. It's just hard to convince myself."

Techno chuffs, and once again Tommy relaxes slightly. "I understand."

"...I trust you the most, though. It's mostly Phil and Wilbur my brain's worried about. And *mostly* mostly Wilbur."

Techno turns his head, watching Tommy with interest. "Why Wilbur?"

Tommy crosses his arms, already ready to rant. "Because he's an obsessive fuck! He decided I was going to be his brother within like, five seconds, so what happens when he changes his mind just as fast? I'm gonna get fucked over!"

"He won't," Techno says with certainty. "The problem with Wilbur," he starts, taking a seat at his desk and facing Tommy, "is that he gets attached to the temporary. People and things that are doomed to die and rot. If you... ran away, didn't take eternity- in another few hundred years, he'd still be talkin' about you."

Tommy bites the inside of his mouth to stop himself from reacting- he wants to grin like an idiot at the thought of being *remembered* like that. At someone giving a shit long after he's gone. "You don't *know* that."

"I know Wilbur." Techno's expression straightens out, and he tilts his head back, staring up at the ceiling. "Eternity does kinda... freeze you a little bit. He'll probably always be the same type of person he was at twenty-four. Egotistical, self-absorbed, and narcissistic. Y'know, like a normal young adult."

Now, Tommy's gonna have to worry about whatever the fuck 'eternity freezes you' means a little later. "...aren't you like. Basically Wilbur's age."

Techno snorts. "I didn't grow up a spoiled prince, like he did."

Tommy leans against the side of the desk, interested. "How *did* you grow up, then?"

For a minute, he thinks maybe that was a fucked up thing to ask. Techno tilts his head away, but he still gets a glimpse of something pained, and Tommy racks his brain to find a joke or something to change the subject, but- "With Phil."

Tommy blinks at him. "...with Phil?"

"With Phil," Techno repeats, looking back at him. "I, uh... I've never told you about my power." It's not a question. "It's luck." Before Tommy can even *process* that, because what the fuck? What the *fuck*? Why would he not know that- how would *Dream* not know that- Techno continues. "Not like Dream's. Mine is bad luck. For *everyone* around me. I lost my whole sounder to it- just a variety of accidents and mishaps before they could realize it was my fault and send me out."

"Oh," Tommy says quietly. "That's fucked up."

Techno smiles slightly. "Yup. Don't worry about it. I don't even remember them. I was tryin' to survive on my own, but, uh, I was a shoat myself. Phil stumbled on me when I was starvin' to death, and I pretty much, uh.... grabbed onto him and refused to let go."

...oh, he can just *picture* it. A tiny little Techno- literally exactly like he is now but scaled down, which is totally inaccurate but it's the funniest fucking mental image- just nabbing Phil's ankles and clinging as Phil tries to walk away. Tommy has to bite his mouth again to not laugh out loud.

"Yeah, yeah, sounds stupid," Techno has to try not to laugh too. "But he took eternity so he'd be, uh, more resilient to any possible accidents while I figured out how to shut off my powers. Pretty sure he was already plannin' to take eternity, but, y'know, good excuse. He raised me- we were survivalists, adventurers, and I grew up knowin' the value of hard work. When I took eternity, I had that mindset... and I still have it. Wilbur took it as a prince, and he still expects to get whatever he wants the second he wants it."

"What about Phil?"

Techno smiles more. "He's got that... what'd you call it? Mama bird instinct. He took eternity as an adventurer, yeah, but raisin' a kid was his highest priority. Pretty sure that's why he tries to adopt any sad-lookin' orphan he can find."

...so Wilbur's going to care about Tommy forever because he's just as greedy as Tommy. Phil will because he's 'family-oriented' or what the fuck ever. Techno's Techno. It should be fine, right?

Literally it's all spelled out in front of him. Every piece of evidence says 'it will be okay you stupid fuck', and yet he's still, *still* thinking about that stupid fucking *what if*-

"Sooo..." Techno interrupts his thoughts. "Question. Is this really worse than when you showed up to our house not knowin' anything about us? I mean, we're villains. Pretty much guaranteed you would have died under most circumstances, but you walked straight in here and didn't even hesitate, so... why is it a problem now that you *do* know us?"

That's an easy question. "I mean, I didn't feel like I was *in* danger. I mean, I kind of was, because I got got by some of your traps, but like... I had a deal for you. We were going to be business partners, yeah? Who'd be scared of a *business partner*?"

Techno falls quiet as Tommy rambles on a little further- about how he realized the *art of the deal* when he got treated like a *god* in Las Nevadas just because he was working with Ace, how he could get whatever he wanted in exchange for a book or a healing session- before interrupting yet again. "So... this maybe isn't the healthiest option, but why don't you just come up with another deal?"

Tommy blinks at him. "What?"

"You can't convince yourself that we're not goin' to change. So... make a deal. Somethin' you think is fair, that would keep you safe." Techno looks back up, avoiding eye contact. "I don't know what *kind* of deal- uh, we never renegotiated your healin' contract if you took eternity? You could do somethin' with that."

...a deal. What the *fuck* kind of deal could keep him safe forever? Being a good healer would keep him safe long enough for a human lifetime, but what the fuck could possibly be worth

eternity? He racks his brain- maybe if he experimented with his powers more, tried to make them even *stronger*? Or if he got more involved in their villainy shit, made himself useful, like an actual partner instead of just an employee? Or if he-

“Oh,” Tommy says out loud. “Oh, fuck. I’ve got it.”

“...well, that was faster than I thought. What is it?”

“Not telling.” Techno lets out an offended noise, and Tommy turns towards the cabinet of potions. Techno may have shut it, but he never locked it, so Tommy throws it open and pokes through them. “I’m taking one of these. I’ll pay you back- uh, we’ll make more of it later!”

He shoves it in his pocket as Techno stands up. “Wait, what one did you just-”

“Don’t worry about it! I’ve gotta go do something, thanks for the lesson and the potion and the idea, holy *shit* Tech this is gonna be *good*- ”

“Wait. Wait, Theseus-”

It’s too late, Tommy’s already out the door. He slams it behind him and bolts, almost slipping as the hall rug slides under him, but he manages to stop himself from falling and keeps running. He’s got a plan and he’s going to put it in action *right now* and then they’ll owe him literally forever and he can finally, *finally* fucking relax! Nothing can stop him right now-

Except running straight into Phil.

Chapter End Notes

double update incoming

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

WARNING: if you jump straight to the most recently posted chapter, be aware that i updated two chapters right after each other! this chapter will not make sense if you missed the one before it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The first thing Tommy does after recovering from the shock of the collision is pat his pocket frantically. Sure, he could go take another potion from Techno's storage, almost definitely, but then he'd also probably have to explain himself before Techno would let him, which... he doesn't want to do. This will go much smoother if no one knows what he's planning beforehand.

Luckily, the bottle is still unbroken in his pocket. Which is a little weird- he hit the ground *hard* - but he's not complaining. It's always a pain to heal injuries with glass in them.

"Tommy?" Phil asks, a little dazed from his own fall. "Are you alright? Why the rush?"

"I'm fine, king, just on my way to talk to Wilbur," he says quickly, stumbling over his words a little as he gets to his feet. Without thinking, he grabs Phil's hand to drag him to his feet, too. Phil doesn't hesitate to take it and let himself be pulled up, but he *does* pause after that.

"Do you need to talk to him this moment? If you have a few minutes, I'd like to talk to you, too," he says, his voice careful, like he's handling a bomb instead of Tommy, who's his... his nothing, right now, but if all goes according to plan...

Wow, he *cannot* think about that right now, it brings up so many emotions at once that he feels nauseous. What was he asking? "Uhhhhh," Tommy drags out as he considers. He wants to get this over with- he already chickened out once, he can't do it again, and he's *sure* he'll feel better when it's over and done with and then- then-

But this *is* Phil. Phil, who Tommy's been kind of freezing out of his own family. Tommy winces at the thought. Bit fucked up of him, actually. And when this is over with, Tommy will... they'll be *flock*, so maybe he can spare a few minutes. Just a few! And then he'll get back to hunting down Wilbur.

"Sure, but if Techno shows up I'm gone."

Phil blinks at him. "You're avoiding Techno?" he asks, sounding concerned.

"I'm avoiding the *consequences* of my *actions*," Tommy clarifies in a way that actually clarifies nothing. "I don't think he's actually chasing me, though. Probably fine. Don't worry

about it!”

Phil just blinks again. “...if you’re sure. Why don’t we move to the- to my nest, then?” he suggests, a little hopeful.

The thought makes Tommy hunch his shoulders up- he’s not sure how he feels about that. Phil’s nest was great when he was... kind of having a breakdown or whatever it was... but he has his *own* nest now, so willingly going to Phil’s feels kind of like... if he walked into Dream’s room. Which he only ever did *once*, right before running away. It’s like enemy territory.

Then again, he doesn’t want Phil in his nest yet, either. Not until they’re *flock* - which has now become a certainty in his mind. They *will* be flock. He has to fight down the chirp that threatens to bubble up and accept Phil right now, and he pinches his mouth together to stop it.

“Or not,” Phil says. “We could go to, ah, the living room, maybe? Or... anywhere, really, besides standing around in the hallway.”

Ah, fuck. This is a *conversation*, not just a talk. “We can go to the nest,” he grumbles, and Phil immediately lights up before leading the way.

The nest is the same, except for the *very* dead flowers. Did Phil really leave them in here all that time? That’s kind of gross. ...maybe Tommy should replace them? For now, he just shoves the dead ones to the side and drops into his part- no, he doesn’t have a *part* of Phil’s nest. The part of the nest he stayed in before, then. Tommy crosses his arms. “What did you want to talk about?”

Phil doesn’t answer at first, fluffing up part of the nest. Tommy’s uneasy, part of his brain calling this *wrong-wrong-wrong*, that he shouldn’t be in Phil’s nest. Another part is trying to call him *flock*, flattered by Phil keeping the flowers and now organizing the nest to better fit him. It’s just as nauseating as thinking about Phil maybe being his-

“Well,” Phil starts. “I was wondering if there was anything I could do for you.”

“...huh?” Tommy cocks his head. “What do you mean?”

Phil sighs. “Well, I mean that you’re... uncomfortable with me. For obvious reasons, your instincts don’t like-” He cuts himself off sharply. “No, I can’t use that as an excuse. You have carnivores and another avian in your flock. It’s not about species, it’s about *me*. ”

Tommy sinks down in his spot in the nest, wanting to let the blankets drown him. “Well, uh, Phil, it’s not really...”

“You don’t need to cover it up.” Phil finally joins him in the nest, leaving a little space between them. “I just want to know what it is. How can I fix it? How can I make you more *comfortable*?”

He winces again. “I’m... I can fix it myself, Phil, I’m going to. Just give me, like-”

“Is it the nest?” Phil interrupts. “I’ve thought about improving it, but I don’t know what you’d like to keep in it- you like the jewelry Techno gives you, right? I could incorporate that.”

“It’s- it’s not the nest, big man,” Tommy tries to tell him, but Phil is barely paying attention, sounding almost neurotic as he goes on.

“Or- I know Techno makes you all your meals now, other than those waffles the other day. If you let me prove that I can provide for you again-”

Tommy quickly shakes his head. “No, Techno- he likes cooking for me, that’s a conversation we gotta have some time too actually-”

Phil bulldozes right through that topic, too. “Then there’s- I could start-”

This is pathetic. It’s painful to listen to, and Tommy can’t stop himself from cutting him off. “*Phil*. It’s because you’re- you’re trying to be my- my dad.” The word sounds *wrong* coming out of his mouth- he’s almost never had a reason to say it before. He shifts uncomfortably.

Phil, meanwhile, is frozen. Tommy isn’t looking at him, but he can still tell he’s completely still. “Oh,” he says after a long moment. “I see.”

The hurt in his voice brings a spike of anxiety- whether it’s guilt that Tommy hurt his feelings, or fear, he can’t quite tell. “Okay that’s not exactly- I mean don’t get it twisted Phil, it’s not that I don’t- I mean you’re great, really you are, one of the greatest men probably, big fan of your wings and some of the fucked up shit you’ve done to Dream before we met-” He’s just spewing words now. He tries to reel it back in. “But I’ve never *had* one of those before.”

“But... you had foster parents before you stayed with Dream, didn’t you?”

Tommy snorts and glances over. “Yeah, but not ones that liked me. I mean, the farmer was alright, all I had to do was some chores around the farm and I could do whatever I wanted, right? But before that- I was a problem child, yeah? Loud and made a lot of noises and did a lot of things that didn’t make sense, holy shit the system failed me by not checking me for hybridism- but I never had, uh, parents. And I was in the foster system as soon as I was born, I think. Don’t know shit about my actual parents.”

“Oh, I see,” Phil says again, still sounding pained, but... not as hurt this time. More like he’s pitying Tommy, which he does not care for at *all*, but- at least he’s not as upset now. “So it’s that this is... new to you.”

“Yeah. That and some other trauma shit I’m trying to figure out, but like- I don’t know. I don’t know how I feel about having a... dad. Even if Techno and Wilbur are my... brothers, I guess, it’s- it’s weird to think that comes with a parent this time. I mean, I guess technically the Captain was my mom? But maybe only legally, only saw her a few times, and they never really *said* that, she just pretended to be my social worker and then she tried to homeschool me for a bit until she admitted it was fucked up what she did and then Dream stopped letting her come by so-”

He stops when he sees how *horrified* Phil looks. Has he not brought this up before? He can't keep track of which parts he's brought up to which person, and there's no way he's gonna have a fun little family meeting where he sits down the whole flock to hash out his entire tragic backstory, but-

"Puffy did what?" Phil asks faintly.

...oh. Didn't Phil say, ages ago, that he and the others had some associates in the Hero Organization? Hm. "Uh... well, I told the Captain I didn't want to work for the heroes, so... she came back as a social worker and introduced me to Dream. Who I guess is- was- her kid, because she always treated him like it and called him her *duckling* or whatever- bit weird, considering she's a goat and he's a human but, y'know, whatever family petnames you wanna use I guess- and then she came by a few times to homeschool me since I wasn't allowed outside of Dream's apartment, but. Yeah. Stopped coming by."

Tommy watches Phil through his explanation, watching as the horror gets worse, looking more like... hurt? Betrayal? Maybe some anger, which makes his anxiety flare *right the fuck up why is he in an angry avian's nest-*

Phil lets out a deep sigh, leaning back in the nest, and a little bit of Tommy's stress goes with it. "I'm so sorry she did that. That's- I'm so sorry," he says quietly.

Tommy shrugs, looking the other way. "I mean, that was a while ago. And Dream's dead, and she felt bad by the end of it I guess, so... whatever. My *point* is that I just don't know how to deal with parents. Especially not dads. So I'm just... look, I'm *working* on getting over it, right? It's just- the parents who came by to meet kids always hated me, and the only person who wanted to adopt me was a dickhead who fucking- slid from 'good brother' to 'abusive piece of shit' pretty fast- so it's hard to like... to like accept that someone would want to. You know?"

"Oh, Tommy," Phil says, and Tommy keeps staring at the wall even as he feels the nest shift, Phil moving closer. "Of course someone would want to. Of course *I* would want to, but- I wouldn't be the only one. Yes, you had some bad luck with prospective parents, and I'm sure unrealized avian ancestry didn't help that, but that doesn't mean that you're *unwanted* or anything like that."

He scoffs, curling up more. "I know that," he mumbles.

"...it's okay if you can't trust me yet," Phil says softly.

"I don't know if I'll *ever* be able to trust you, Phil. I'm fucking *trying*, but it's just-" He needs to get to Wilbur. That's the only chance, he thinks.

Phil coos at him soothingly, and Tommy has to fight against relaxing. That's fucking cheating, frankly. "Tommy," hands grab at him, not too roughly, and he's pulled closer, the movement allowing Phil to wrap a wing around him. "It's okay. You won't be able to doubt me forever. No matter how long it takes, eventually you'll have to accept-"

“Shut the fuck up,” Tommy says sharply, the comfort turning cold instantly. “You know saying that shit is creepy as fuck, right?”

He has the *gall* to be taken aback, like he really doesn’t realize how fucked up it is. “Well- it’s true, you can’t-”

“It doesn’t matter how true it is! It’s creepy as fuck! Don’t say shit like that!” Tommy swallows hard. “That- you make it sound like fucking *Stolkholm Syndrome*, like ‘oh if we keep you long enough you’ll be forced to think of us as family’-” Phil chokes. “It’s fucked up! I’ll fucking- I’ll get over my shit at my own pace, not yours, and saying shit like that just makes it worse, okay? Shut the *fuck* up.”

“I...” Phil holds him a little tighter. “I’m sorry,” he forces out, the words sounding strangled, like he’s trying not to chirp. “I didn’t think of it like that. I meant it in a good way-”

“Don’t give a shit,” Tommy huffs.

“I just mean- you don’t need to rush yourself. I’m a patient man, Tommy, I can wait.”

“Sure,” he mutters, rolling his eyes. “So you’re definitely not super jealous that Wilbur and Fundy got in my flock first, and you’re not so *clingy* you’d drag me to your nest, and-”

Phil squawks in offense. “Wh- I am not- listen, mate, if you don’t want your instincts held against you then don’t hold mine against *me*-”

“Ohhh, Phil fucking Angel-of-Death, scariest villain in the world, laid low by a single fucking bird that doesn’t want to be his *bestie*-”

“Flock is so much different than *best friends* and you know that, you little shit-”

“Whatever will you do, Mister Angel-of-Death, when the-”

“It’s Minecraft,” Phil interrupts, and Tommy pauses, confused. He raises an eyebrow at him. “My last name. My *full* name is Philza Minecraft.”

“...it’s fucking *what*. ” He’s even more confused, but he’s torn between being in awe and making fun of Phil for the rest of his life.

“Philza Minecraft,” he repeats. “I know it’s a bit *silly*- Fundy named that game of his after me to lessen the chance of anyone finding it and using it against me. Or so he said.”

“...your actual fucking last name is- wait, what about Wilbur and Techno? Are they-?”

Phil smiles at him. “Wilbur’s actually is Soot. My wife and I planned to use it as a decoy name, to make sure he was safe from Old Magic, but I suppose announcing it actually settled it in as his real name. And Techno’s true name was confirmed before we met him- it’s *Technoblade*, for the record, just a mononym.”

Tommy just stares at him. Okay, first of all, Phil is just handing over full names like treats, which- aren’t they supposed to be more careful than that? He was around when Old Magic

was huge- fuck, even Wilbur said that people sometimes didn't give out their names when *he* was born, so like- Phil had thousands of years to have that whole 'don't give out your true name' thing ingrained in him, but he's telling Tommy anyway?

Secondly. "My last name is going to be *Minecraft*?" he blurts out in excitement. "Fucking-Tommy Underscore-Beloved- *Minecraft*? That's- that is *so* fucking pog, Phil, you have no goddamn idea, holy shit-" Tommy completely ignores how Phil's eyes have gone wide, even his irises doing some... weird shit. Whatever. Not his problem. "Fucking *Minecraft*, primes, you know I didn't actually have a last name. Or if I did, it wasn't in the system I guess, I was only in there as Theseus, which made school and shit real annoying, and I got Dream's when he adopted me but he faked my paperwork or whatever so it said my name was Theodore Taken which is the shittiest name I think- so Tommy fucking *Minecraft*, holy-"

Phil chirps at him- *flock*?- and he goes silent, surprised. He... shouldn't be, maybe, really it should be surprising that Phil didn't do this some other time, but- oh. Oh, Tommy said his name *is* going to be Minecraft. Like it's a certainty. Which it kind of is, because he's stealing it, but also he did just kind of confirm that he's going to accept that Phil will be his-

Flock, Phil chirps again, less of a question and more of a confirmation. His hand reaches up, running through Tommy's hair- the closest he can get to preening, Tommy remembers someone telling him, and it gets harder to avoid chirping back at him. *My fledgling*, Phil coos as his fingers carefully untangle Tommy's hair, not so much as tugging on it. *My flock*.

"Phil," he says, a little weakly, still fighting the urge.

He pays Tommy's pathetic protest no mind. *You're safe, fledgling*, his song promises. *Safe, protected, cared for, loved...*

"Phil," Tommy repeats, his voice almost breaking.

Loved, loved, my flock, my fledgling-

He chirps.

Almost immediately the hand drops from his hair and his heartbeat picks up, terrified, like he just showed weakness to a predator, but all Phil does is hug him tight again, his wings wrapping around Tommy, sheltering him from anything outside the nest. Tommy's never paid much attention to the details of Phil's wings before- they're beautiful, yeah, but they always just looked black. When he's wrapped in them like this, though, he can see- there are little pinpricks of white that look like they're almost glowing in the dark, like stars lighting up the night. *Flock*, Phil coos again, and he lets out another pleased chirp when Tommy repeats after him.

Tommy... should be pissed, maybe. It's not the same as when Wilbur accidentally tricked him into calling him flock, but it's still- he was going to *wait*, alright, he was going to do the thing with Wil and then it would have been fine- but Phil saying- chirping- all that shit, it's- it was too fucking much. Like he couldn't stop himself from believing it when he chirped like that.

Which- is weird and untrue, because when he lets himself realize that they're *flock*, that Phil wants him, there's still that painful doubt, a part of him that says it's all a trick, that things will change in a blink of an eye- but in that moment, he believed Phil completely, that he was fucking... loved and shit. God. Fuck Phil.

But he's not pissed, actually. He's happy. Or maybe... relieved? Comfortable? He feels like a weight is off his shoulders. Phil's nest isn't making him anxious anymore, being near another avian isn't stressing him out because that's *his* avian, *his* flock. Phil seems just as relieved and comfortable, from how he's just chirping more affection, more promises of safety and love.

"...you," Tommy swallows, trying to make his mouth make words instead of chirps. "You know, if you had Wil's powers, I think you'd be fucked," he manages to get out. "You're practically spewing joy already."

Phil struggles to speak clearly as well. "Well," he almost coos. "I'm just happy that my fledgling-"

"I'm not a child, dickhead," he mumbles. "As much as you and all those fucks want to pretend that I am."

"...sure, Tommy," Phil says, his voice sickeningly fond. "If you're such a big man, I'm sure you'd be happy to accept eternity as you are, then? I'm sure sixteen is *old enough*-"

Tommy shoots his head up to look at him. "Phil. Philza. Philza Minecraft, biggest man ever, now let's wait a minute. Would you really deny me the chance to legally drink?"

"Oh, absolutely," he says with a grin. "I can't imagine how much trouble you'd get into drunk."

"Phiiiiil," he whines. "Didn't *you* say I should wait until I was eighteen anyway?"

"Yes, and I still think you should, but if you think you're too big to be called my fledgling..."

"Fine, whatever," Tommy huffs. "Wait, you're fucking ancient. Did you even have drinking ages back when you were born? ...did they even have alcohol then-?"

"Oh, you little shit- I don't *predate* alcohol! But I'm still holding you to the drinking age, regardless of how it was when I was young. It'll kill your brain cells-"

"We already know I can heal those!" Tommy says. "So it's basically not even a problem!"

"I'm hiding all the drinks in the house," Phil chuckles. "Not until you're at least eighteen."

"Bitch. Fucker. Beloathed. I take back calling you the biggest man ever."

"Of course you do."

Phil still sounds way too happy, even as Tommy insults him. Tommy pulls himself out of his arms, even if he's still caged in by the wings. "You are a dickhead and a wrong'un and I don't

even feel bad about putting off making you flock because I thought it was nice you were jealous of everyone else. I'm going to drink so much and do so many drugs when I'm eighteen."

"You're going to give me as much trouble as your brothers, aren't you?" Phil asks, and Tommy's heart squeezes at how he says it, how *simple* it is for Phil to call Wilbur and Techno his brothers, how easily he accepts Tommy as one of his *family*, not just his flock.

"I, uh," Tommy clears his throat. "I have to- I still have to go talk to Wil."

"Oh, right," Phil says with just a tinge of disappointment. He lowers his wings, freeing Tommy, who's quick to stand up.

"Yeah, I just- Tech suggested I do something to try to, uh, get my brain to shut the fuck up about how it thinks you guys are gonna- anyway I know what to do. So I'm gonna go... do that."

Phil raises his eyebrows. "Sorry, what are you going to do to Wilbur?"

"I won't be long," Tommy promises in lieu of an answer. "By like- dinnertime, I guess? Everything will be good. Make a fucking *feast* in celebration, big man- or order in something good, maybe."

"...I can do that," Phil agrees instead of pressing him further. He seems pleased, actually- probably happy that Tommy's letting him cook for him again.

Tommy shuffles towards the door. When Phil doesn't say anything more, or even get up to follow him, he bolts through it, heading through the hall. He checks his pocket again, pulling out the bottle inside. The dark Weakness potion inside swirls as he looks at it- still in good condition. A painkiller, Techno mentioned offhand. Hopefully it'll be good enough.

Hopefully Tommy can pull this off.

Chapter End Notes

we're hitting the end lads.

also, have some fucking FANART??? artists hear abt a scene with flowers and go fucking buckwild apparently

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Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy pauses in front of Wilbur's door. It's cracked open, just enough for him to hear the music coming from inside.

"One day, I know that you will be there, one day, I'll focus on the future, maybe one day, oh baby isn't life so fucking inconsistent?"

Tommy hasn't heard this one before. He wants to stand out here and listen to the whole thing through- or go inside, sit on Wilbur's floor and listen to it up close. Wilbur would let him, he knows. He'd fucking soak up Tommy's attention while he played.

Instead, he knocks on the door, sudden and loud enough to make the music stop instantly. There's shuffling inside, and within a few moments Wilbur is opening the door. "Tommy!" He sounds way too happy to see him.

Which, sure. Tommy hasn't exactly been hanging out with him, even since they became flock. "Hi, Wil," he says before elbowing his way into Wilbur's bedroom.

Wilbur's quick to get out of his way to let him in. If he was a dog hybrid, his tail would be wagging. "What's up? Did you hear me playing?"

"Uh- yeah. I wanna hear that song later," he admits easily, and Wilbur lights up. "But I wanted to ask you something."

"Sure, what is it?" he asks as he shuts the door behind them.

"Wil... what would you do for me to accept eternity?"

Wilbur whips his head around to stare at him. "I... I wouldn't force you," he says, sounding almost in pain from the promise. "I swear I wouldn't. I-"

Tommy rolls his eyes. "No, bitch, I mean like a bribe."

"Oh. Oh!" He perks right back up. "Literally anything! You're considering it?"

"Yeah. Drink this." Tommy pulls out the Weakness potion, holding it out to him.

Wilbur takes it without hesitation, but he does look it over. "Uh, what exactly-?"

"I didn't say ask questions, Wil. I said drink it." Wilbur glances between him and the bottle before uncorking it. "Wait- shit, hang on. Sit down first, I think." Wilbur pauses, but goes to take a seat on the bed. As soon as he's seated, he downs the whole bottle. As soon as it's empty, the bottle drops from his hand, and he slumps over, his head smacking against his bed's headboard. "...maybe I should have told you to lie down instead. But I think you would

have choked? Which is worse, actually. Don't think my healing could fix that. Well, maybe? I've never tried it. I should talk to Techno about that."

"Whht..?" Wilbur slurs, his eyes lazily drifting over to fix on Tommy. One of his fingers twitches, but it seems like that's all he's capable of. Weakness potions seem kinda fucked, now that he thinks about it.

Still, he only has so long- four minutes, the label on the cabinet said- so Tommy quickly takes a seat next to him. "Look, I- I was going to do this for the holiday," he tries to explain himself. "I just kind of panicked and made those ugly little bookmarks instead. But I- I've been fucking, you know, trying to convince myself that you guys aren't going to turn around and suddenly- suddenly hate me or act like Dream as soon as I'm stuck with you for all of- of eternity-" Wilbur lets out a weak noise of protest, and Tommy nods. "Yeah, I know, okay? Like I get it, logically, and mentally, and shit, but emotionally my brain will just not fucking let it *rest*."

He reaches over, turning Wilbur on his side. He's going to need room for this, or it'll probably get kind of fucked up, healing powers or no healing powers. The shirt's gonna get in the way, too... but probably not *too* badly, and he's not about to strip the guy when he can't move. Or ever. Ew.

"So anyway, Techno suggested I make a deal, right? Something to make me feel safe, like- like a business deal, like when I first came here. Because that's when I felt safe, because I had something to offer you and you wouldn't hurt me as long as I could give it." Another mangled protest comes from Wilbur, and Tommy just nods. "Yeah, king, I know, but- I needed that, right? I needed that. So it was a good idea from Techno, yeah? If I could come up with a deal that would keep me safe for the rest of *eternity*, I wouldn't have anything to be worried about."

Wilbur hums questioningly, and Tommy takes it as encouragement to go on. "But I don't think there's a deal that'll actually work. I mean, what would work for literally forever, right? Eventually whatever novelty of the deal would wear off and it wouldn't work anymore. But... a *debt* would work forever, right? If I did something so good that you'd owe me- that you'd *all* owe me- then you couldn't hurt me. Not ever."

Wilbur doesn't respond to that. Tommy isn't sure why, but he doesn't have the time to think about it- he probably just wasted a minute rambling. He has to get it done *now*. He grabs Wilbur by the arm, takes a deep breath-

And he feels the missing limbs on Wilbur's back. The skin is scarred where they used to be, and he rips the scars open, making room for him to grow. There's no response from Wilbur- hopefully the Weakness potion is strong enough he can't feel it at all, even as blood stains the back of his shirt and drips through to the bed. Tommy closes his eyes, focusing. He's looked into bone structure and the muscles of avian wings, and between that and his natural intuition, he's fucking *sure* he can pull this off. Or... kind of sure, but he doesn't have the time to doubt himself.

Like he learned when he grew back someone's leg, it's hard to create bone marrow from nothing. Flesh is easy- it's just like when he heals a cut, pulling skin and muscles together

and making new flesh to sew it together, but now he just has to grow it outward, in the right shape- but *bones* . He has to reach his powers into Wilbur's back, pulling out just a sliver of his shoulder blade, to give him a starter base. From there he can expand it like fixing a broken bone but, you know, worse, because he's creating multiple fucking bones from a *shard* .

It's weird, trying to create wings. It was easier with fixing a leg- Tommy *has* legs, he knows how they work, how they walk, how the ankles bend and how each toe moves. Wings, though? That's so unfamiliar. He can kind of imagine how they work- he's seen it on Phil, he's had... little daydreams about if he had wings himself, but is that enough to base the real thing on?

Slowly, the base of the wings starts to grow out from Wilbur's back under his shirt, bone and muscles and flesh forming. Tommy prays to the prime gods that he's shaping them right as he pushes more power into it, trying to make it *faster*, before the Weakness can wear off and Wilbur will start to feel it. Wilbur's started making quiet, confused noises, as well as an attempt to move, but it's easy to hold him still with just the hand on his arm. He doesn't want Wilbur to break his wings before they're done, that'll take too much time to fix.

...he doesn't know how long they're supposed to be. *Fuck*. Tommy makes an educated guess, based on Phil's wings, which were *just* wrapped around him, and he takes a deep breath as they grow, trying to stave off panic.

Worst case scenario, what, they cut them off and try again? But he can get this. He swears he can do this right. He squeezes his eyes shut and imagines how the wings would feel on his own back, how the muscles would move and the wings could stretch. He uses that mental image as he keeps pressing waves of power into Wilbur's back, hoping it's enough to make them right.

The half-grown wings lay limp under Wilbur's shirt as they take shape, and Tommy- he doesn't like that. He knows it's because of the Weakness potion, because Wilbur can't move them the same way he can't move anything else, but he feels like he's fucking this up, like he's going to fucking horribly ruin Wilbur's wings and even trying again will never make up for this *fuck up*-

He's tired. He's only halfway through and he's *tired*.

Maybe he wants to be panicking. That will push him through the exhaustion.

This is worse than the leg, he thinks, but he doesn't stop. He has what, one minute? Maybe a little more? He pushes more, harder, and lilacs spill from his hands, enough that they're spilling off the bed and onto the floor. Tommy blinks, woozy like *he's* the one covered in his own blood instead of Wilbur, but it's working. The wings are large enough to rip through the back of Wilbur's shirt, too big to fit under them, and he stares as the tips solidify, the base shape finished.

He almost drops his hand, almost stops there- they're grown, he could be done- but they're bare. Wilbur can't fly without feathers. He's... he's not sure how to grow those, but he grew the wings in part because Wilbur is *meant* to have them, and he's *meant* to have feathers as

well, so maybe he can just- try even more? Put even more power into it, just without focus this time?

Tommy slumps forward, unable to keep himself upright as he uses even more power to try to force Wilbur's wings into growing feathers. He can barely even keep his hand wrapped around Wilbur's arm at this point, but he's got... seconds?

No. He's out of time. "Tommy?" Wilbur asks, his voice still slightly slurred, but that's enough-

Joy and wonder, like he's rarely felt before. Like when he was little and Tubbo loved him enough to give him the only things he had of his father. Like when Wilbur first cut his arm open to fix Tommy's need to heal. His head spins with it, he would laugh or cry of happiness if he had the energy to do anything besides breathe. Heaven, this is Heaven, he wants to feel this for the rest of time or nothing else will ever, ever match up-

Tommy can vaguely hear Wilbur calling his name, can faintly feel as arms wrap around him and hold him close, but he can't do anything but stare blankly into the distance. His limbs are trapped, not just by Wilbur holding him, but by his own exhaustion. Black spots fade in and out of his vision before he's just... gone.

When Tommy stirs, he hurts. Not like he hasn't used his powers in a while, but *physically* sore, like he's overextended his elbow, but it's in his entire body. He tries to fix it, but his head swims the moment he pulls on his powers- it's too soon, like his reserves are *empty*. He huffs, the only noise he has the energy to make, and then-

He wakes again. The soreness is still present, but a little less. It's duller, and he can live with it. He's a little less tired now, enough for him to force an eye open. For a moment, he doesn't recognize where he is- he was in Wilbur's room, right? But this isn't it. He's lying facedown, so all he sees is the blanket under him, but if it's familiar he can't place it. He tries to roll over, tries to turn his head, even just tries to open his other eye, but it's too much of a strain. He's too exhausted.

He wakes again. This time it doesn't take Tommy too long to realize where he is- letting his head fall to the side lets him realize that he's been tucked into Phil's nest. He also realizes that Tubbo is pressed up against him, curled into Tommy's side. He can just barely see Tubbo's horns at this angle, when they're this close but he can't move his head. He can also feel someone on his other side- taller, feels kind of cold, it's probably Ranboo- but he can't bring himself to turn his head the other way. He's comfortable pressed between them, and-

He wakes again. Techno is burning hot as he holds Tommy tight, but Tommy can't bring himself to give a shit. He tries to shift closer, but he can only slightly lift his arm to drape it over Techno's side. He's lying down wrong, though, his arms numb under him from lying on them, and he just barely manages to get them free. He doesn't realize there's a contradiction there.

He wakes again. He can feel hands... somewhere behind him, fixing... something. It's unfamiliar and confusing, and his brain just can't process whatever it is right now. Still, it's comfortable, and he drifts back asleep while Phil coos something he isn't listening to.

He wakes again. Tommy blinks slowly- he's been moved, sitting up now, and someone's in the doorway. He forces his eyes open more to try to get a good look, and the person- Fundy, definitely- yelps and drops something on the ground. Tommy's quick to decide that's too much excitement for him and-

He wakes again.

"Tommy?" Wilbur asks quietly from the edge of Phil's nest. Tommy looks at him, though he can't quite make his eyes focus. There's large, dark blue shapes over his shoulders. "Are you awake, sunflower?" Tommy hums. He's not really sure. Wilbur laughs quietly. "Do you need to sleep more? You really wiped yourself out."

"F'k off..." Even that little bit of talking exhausts him more, but he doesn't want to prove Wilbur right.

"Sorry, sunflower," he says before coming closer, joining him in the nest. One of the big, blue things drapes over Tommy, almost like a blanket, and despite himself he closes his eyes-

Wait. No. *No*.

He forces his eyes open and blinks a few times, trying to clear his vision before looking down. It's a *wing*. It's *Wilbur's wing*.

They're almost black at the base, fading in a gradient to a deep, royal blue halfway through, and he doesn't *think* the feathers are all grown in all the way, but they clearly *are* growing. He has wings and feathers and- Tommy did it. He fucking *did it*. Even if it meant he fell asleep for... who knows how long, he fucking did it!

"Your... th' wings," he mumbles.

Wilbur coos, *I love you so much*. "You were right. I'll owe you *forever*, Toms." He stretches the wing out further, showing off. "It's perfect- as soon as my flight feathers finish growing in, I'll... I'll be able to fly again. *Thank you*, sunflower."

His joy spills over again, or maybe it's actually Tommy being happy for him, he can't tell. He raises a shaking hand, trying to grab Wilbur's wings- if he just heals it a bit more, he can probably finish growing the feathers for him-

Before he can so much as brush a finger against it, Wilbur pulls it back, tucking his wing behind him. "No, Tommy," he says quietly. "Don't use your powers, it's fine, they'll grow back at their own pace."

"But I c'n..." he tries to offer, but Wilbur shakes his head.

"Tommy, you... you've been asleep for weeks. You can't push yourself right now."

...weeks? He thought hours, maybe a day or two with how often he woke up, but- weeks? That can't be right. He's never in his *life* had to sleep that long after healing, not even when he was a weak little kid. No, even when he grew that guy's leg back, he just slept eight hours,

and that could have been him going to sleep like *normal* , so why the fuck would he have slept *that long*-?

Tommy tries to push himself to sit up, but he braces himself on something soft and when he tries to change position his back twinges with a sharp pain- ugh, maybe he's been in the nest for too long. That can't have been good for his back. When he stills from the pain, Wilbur takes him by the arm, pulling his bracing arm away and helping him sit up. "Be more careful, sunflower, you don't want to hurt yourself."

"My back hurts," he complains tiredly, and tries to stretch. His arm hits Wilbur. His arms are also above his head.

...huh?

"Yeah, I'd imagine it would," Wilbur says with a hint of amusement, not noticing Tommy's confusion. "No matter how many times we tried to move you so you wouldn't be lying on your wings, you kept trying to roll back over. You'll need to break that habit soon."

Tommy blinks at him. "My what."

"Your wings, sunflower." Wilbur reaches out and runs his hand through- something, over Tommy's- his not-arm, what the fuck is- He twists his head to the side and-

He's very, very awake now.

The wings are a bright blue, like the colors his eyes are when they glow, with light pinpricks of white, almost like Phil's. Tommy jolts and does... something, and his feathers- fully grown, unlike Wilbur's- fluff up in alarm. "What the *fuck*."

"You... didn't mean to?"

"Fucking of *course* I didn't mean to, what the- what the fuck kind of question is that?" He can really feel them now- he doesn't know how he thought they were just *arms*. He can stretch them out individually and holy *shit* that feels so fucking weird- and so fucking *cool*-

"They were just barely growing in when you passed out," Wilbur tells him, still running a hand through his feathers- is that what preening is supposed to be? "We think you were asleep for so long because you were constantly using your powers to keep growing them, even though you were already at your limit."

"I fucking what?" he asks weakly, but glancing down he can see it- the nest is *full* of lilies and sunflowers. Huh. He didn't even know he could heal while unconscious. ...thank fuck Gogy never learned that, either. "I don't... I was trying to grow your feathers but I didn't know how... just kinda tried to use my powers aimlessly, maybe I...?"

"Either way," Wilbur says, far too easily brushing over the most important shit in the universe, "they're incredible, sunflower. I can't *wait* until you're ready to fly."

Ready to fly.

Fly.

Tommy warbles, overwhelmed, and Wilbur coos, *you're okay I love you*. "You're okay," he repeats in words. "I know it's a lot. I was pretty overwhelmed when I realized I had my wings, too. Why don't you try to get more rest?"

Tommy shakes his head, still taken in by the idea of *flying*, something he thought about all the time as a kid, being *possible*. He's also pretty distracted by the fact that he grew himself fucking *wings*, even though he's never had them before- can he just fucking graft hybrid parts onto anybody? Oh, he could make fucking *bank* off that he thinks-

Ah. Power experiments. "Is Techno mad at me?"

Wilbur tilts his head, looking confused. "Why would he be-? Oh, because you stole one of his potions? No, he replaced it immediately. It's not like the ingredients are especially rare or anything."

"No, because he, uh... was trying to get me to stop overusing my powers, and instead..." he pushed them way beyond what he's done before. Growing multiple limbs for Wilbur and himself at basically the same time? Tommy's kind of cracked, actually. Not that he's going to tell Techno that if he's pissed.

That gets a small laugh out of Wilbur. "No, sunflower. He was worried when you didn't wake up- he wouldn't leave you alone for a *week* - but he's not mad. He's grateful that you gave me my wings back." Tommy hums, doubting that a little. " *Everyone* will be glad to know you're awake. Fundy freaked out when he saw you wake up for a minute, and Ranboo had to physically hold Tubbo back from shaking you awake."

"Wow. What a dick," Tommy says with a yawn.

Wilbur very visibly holds back another laugh. "Go back to sleep, Toms. We'll celebrate everything when you're really awake." He returns to carding his hand through Tommy's feathers as Tommy lays back down- on his stomach, his wings really do feel pinned down when he's on his back.

Tommy tilts his head to the side to watch Wilbur preen him. Wilbur's own wings catch his eye, though, and he compares their wings- Wilbur's are much darker, yeah, but the blues still look nice. Like they're related, especially since Tommy has the same spots that Phil does. "Hey, Wil," he murmurs, closing his eyes.

"Yeah, sunflower?"

"We look kind of like brothers now."

next chapter will be the epilogue. we're almost there.

Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

warning: minor torture near the end (stabbing, the beginning of Withering)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream has always been lucky.

He got his power surprisingly young. He was twelve when he first used it, and it'd been so confusing he didn't even realize it at first. The sun had reflected off glass at just the wrong angle, blinding him and making him trip. He winced at the scrape on his knee and took a moment to look at it, and he only had a split second to realize his blood was suddenly *gold-*

And then a car skidded off the road and hit the storefront next to him. Dream would have been hit dead on if it wasn't for him stumbling. If he hadn't been at exactly the right spot to be blinded. He had no idea what it was, but he ran home to his foster mother and cried in her arms like he was still a little kid.

It was embarrassing, and he later pretended it never happened, but there was still gold blood staining his jeans. He'd shown his mother, who smiled and gently told him he probably had a power of some sort and just hadn't realized it yet.

It was a few more times before he realized how it worked- how to draw on *luck*, to always make a coin flip in his favor, to always be the one to find lost money. His blood turned gold as he used it, and he *loved* it- loved the physical evidence of his cool power, yeah, but more importantly, he loved how it matched his brother's mysterious lichtenberg scar, the one he'd had for as long as he remembered.

"We're blood brothers," Dream whispered to Foolish from across their room. He knew it wasn't what the phrase was supposed to mean, but it *meant* something, didn't it? That his blood would bleed the same shade of gold that trailed across his brother's face? Foolish laughed and agreed-

And then, later, Foolish discovered his own powers. Because Dream was *lucky*.

They were fifteen, walking home from high school together. Puffy had offered to pick them up, it being her day off from her job as a *hero*, but they were planning to stop by the grocery store to pick up a cake. Her birthday was the next day, but she was going to be working, and they wanted to surprise her, so even though it was drizzling they made their way there.

They regretted it a little when the rain got heavier. Then more when the winds picked up, when thunder roared far too close far too suddenly, when a branch from a bush whacked Dream in the face and his hand came away from the cut *gold-*

And lightning struck his brother directly.

Dream had only been a step behind him.

Foolish collapsed and Dream could smell *burning flesh* but he ignored it to drop to his brother's side, screaming and trying to revive him-

He didn't have a pulse.

And then he did. Foolish's scar *glowed* under the overcast sky, and Dream watched through wet eyes as the gold spread, the lines becoming thicker. Much more of his face was covered in gold when Foolish gasped, opening his eyes, *alive again*.

Dream escaped death twice because of his power. So did his brother, apparently.

With that, Dream became obsessed with beating death. His luck protected him, and his brother's powers protected *him*, but what about Puffy? Every day, she went out and fought monsters to make the world safer for him and Foolish, but that meant that every day she was in danger of *dying*.

Of dying to the Syndicate, especially. Immortals who had already beaten death and used it to hurt his mother.

The second he was old enough, he signed up for an internship at the Hero Organization. His mother was wary about it, but he brushed off her concerns and threw himself into it. They trained him from sixteen to eighteen, and then immediately set him loose.

And he was *incredible*. The world *bends* under his luck, pieces of buildings that have been standing for decades suddenly crumbling just enough to take out a villain, the wind changing direction to hide his scent from hybrid villains who would otherwise find him, always being exactly where he needs to be to succeed.

Theo was one piece of that. It was luck that he was an orphan, so Puffy would be the one called in to talk to him. It was luck that she kept her license as a social worker up to date even though she had long left that life to be a hero. It was *luck* that Dream overheard her talk about the healer that didn't want to help people, that he was there to offer to talk to the kid at the right time.

It wasn't luck that Theo adored him, though. That was all Dream's doing.

It was so *easy*, too. Dream just had to listen to the kid chatter about whatever, and he chased after Dream like a dog. It was sweet, almost, but Dream couldn't ignore why he was here. For a *healer*.

A healer, one that could cure illnesses and injuries. Who could be used to protect Puffy, to stop his brother from dying- *and how was Foolish so accident prone? How would he come home with the gold spreading further and further, until it almost completely covered his skin, how was he dying, why wouldn't he explain himself?*- as long as Dream convinced him to.

But he had to start slow. Ease him into it, like a frog into a cold pot of water. Dream tried to hint at what he wanted, showing Theo small injuries he got while training, but Theo never offered to heal him. He didn't want to use his powers.

It drove Dream crazy, but he kept playing nice, right up until he woke up in the hospital wing, flowers falling from Theo's hands. After that, he couldn't risk playing nice. Theo had to heal him, had to get stronger, *had* to.

Because if Dream could bleed out on a hospital table, what's stopping George from doing the same?

George. His best friend. The most important person in his *life*. George, who could just smile and Dream would bend over backwards for him. George, who Dream went to bat against the Blade for, almost dying again and again so that George wouldn't have to. George, who he'd bend heaven and hell and limbo for.

George, who he'd force Theo to heal, too.

It made Theo stronger, it made George healthy, it was a good thing! Even if it made Theo pass out from exhaustion, it was worth it, and Theo should have been glad to do it, to be able to fulfill his *purpose*.

Dream worked so hard to keep them safe. He corrected Theo when he was being difficult, he fought monsters stronger than he could physically be, he saved hundreds, *thousands* of lives, the number one hero, the fucking *king* of Essempi.

And no one fucking appreciated it.

George just laid down and accepted whatever Dream did for him, like it was a given, taking it for granted. Foolish grew distant, caring more about his partners and his dumb *construction* business than his own brother. Even Puffy tried to convince him to give Theo away, find him a different home, as if Theo wasn't the only thing keeping Dream alive most days-

And Theo. Fucking *Theo*. Who always wanted more.

He wanted Dream to be his *big brother*, which tore at him more when Foolish spoke to him less and less. He wanted Dream to work less, even if it meant people would *die*. Fuck, *Theo* wanted to work less, hesitated to fix anything less than a broken bone. It was infuriating.

But then Dream got his hands on the book.

Sapnap Halo had been a weird little addition to their group. He had been given to Dream almost as a protege, someone for him to train and protect. His fire powers were useful, something physical to use against villains instead of relying on George's powers knocking people out or Dream having to get up and personal, but they were a double-edged sword, with how easily he could hurt the two of them as well.

Dream was starting to hate letting Theo touch him, and he was sick of fucking flowers. He didn't want Sapnap's accidental burns to make him have to put up with it more.

Sapnap came in handy eventually, though, beyond just what he could do in a fight. See, he thought he was keeping it a secret, but Dream looked into everything- he couldn't let himself get caught off guard. So when Sapnap snuck off to go on a date, Dream knew exactly who he was going to see.

Ace. Formerly known as Quackity Schlatt, formerly the husband of *the* JSchlatt. The JSchlatt who would on occasion, while drunkenly evading the heroes, claim to have the key to eternal life.

Dream used Sapnap's date nights to find an opportunity to break into Ace's home in Las Nevadas. From there, he found scraps of Ace's own search for JSchlatt's belongings, and from there...

From there, he found the book.

It wasn't exactly what he had hoped for, but it was close. The ability to bring anyone back from the dead. There was other magic in there- Withering, Weakness, spells to bring people to the brink of death- but the most important was revival. To be able to reach into the afterlife and drag people back.

The cost was that their afterlife would be... unpleasant, for however long they were in it, but it would be better than actually dying, wouldn't it? Puffy would understand if he had to use it for her. Foolish would, too, if his power ran out when he no longer had unmarked skin to turn gold.

And George would, if Theo *fucked up* enough to actually let him die.

Dream liked to think he taught Theo better than that. He liked to think that Theo finally realized where he belongs- at Dream's side, to heal him whenever he needs. Then he found Theo *touching the book*.

What would he have done with it? Gods know a *teenager* shouldn't have any of the power in that book- no one should, except for Dream. And yet, Theo went against what Dream told him to try to get his hands on it.

He let George do whatever he wanted. Theo being *unable* to get into trouble was a comfort during a difficult time, when Dream was doing his best as a hero and to figure out how to use Old Magic. Sapnap... became more difficult, between his *boyfriends* and his growing distrust of Dream, but it would be fine- if Sapnap stepped too far out of line, Dream could easily discard him. The Hero Organization wouldn't look too kindly on him and Chronos being involved with Ace. It was Dream's own trump card.

Luckily, oh so luckily, he didn't need to use it. Sapnap stopped speaking out about Theo's treatment, eventually enough that he could trust him with an awake Theo while Dream and George went out. He shouldn't have.

Theo was gone.

It was like the apocalypse, like the moon crashed into the planet and destroyed everything he'd ever known. Even before Dream had taught him, Theo had never attempted to leave the apartment. And he'd *learned*, hadn't he, not to touch the revival book, and yet that was *also* missing.

Dream tore apart the city as secretly as he could, searching for a single teenager in every crowd, every alleyway, every homeless shelter. Then he spread outward, combing smaller towns in between bigger cities, then other cities he may have taken shelter in. He had every hero he could convince searching for Theo, but it was like he vanished without a trace. There was *nothing*, no sign of him, no sign of the *book*.

It was a painful revelation to realize that Theo was just as important as the book. That he was actually dependent on Theo's powers, needing them in place of just Healing potions that made his stomach churn and had to be rationed for fear of overdosing. But it would be fine. He'd *find him*-

He'd find him too late. Dream found *George* too late, after all. He'd flashed his power, his luck getting the Warden to miss his presence- and instead, he'd skewered George. Dream hadn't had time to find him a potion, only managing to get him to the apartment before George bled out in his arms.

Dream was so grateful he memorized the book.

George wasn't.

George was so fucking ungrateful for everything, wasn't he? Dream lent him his healer. Dream was trying to discover *immortality*, in part for him. Dream was dating *Siren's son* just to drag their family secrets out of him, *for George!* But no, nothing he ever did was enough, not even after bringing him back from the dead.

Instead, George just stared off into the distance, muttering about someone he called *XD* that would have taken him if Dream hadn't brought him back. Nothing Dream said would snap him out of his daydreams that this fucking- *ghost* or whatever would one day come back for him.

And Sappnap- oh, Sappnap- he was so tightly strung that Dream wanted to snap him. Chronos went missing, Ace had gone radio silent, and Sappnap was almost as screwed up as Dream was about Theo's disappearance, but he wasn't putting *nearly* enough energy into searching so it was just *Dream* going out to look for him, just Dream questioning civilians about if they'd seen him, just Dream doing interviews, practically *begging* for help because no one else *gave* a shit-

And then finally. *Finally*. Someone called in an accurate tip.

Dream didn't even tell George where he was going as he suited up and made his way to the alley Theo had been seen camping in. He'd been so *relieved* to see him okay, that no one had discovered his powers and taken him. Sure, Theo would have to be punished, corrected using whatever methods necessary, but at least he could be brought home.

Siren. The Blade. The Angel of Death.

The fight was a blur, marked by flashes of his own gold blood dripping on the ground, marked by the horrific pain crawling up his hands from Withering, but it would be okay. Theo would heal him. Theo would bloom those stupid fucking flowers and it would be like nothing ever happened.

Limbo was strange. He wasn't sure that was what it was at first, but- well, it was horrible, and Dream remembered how George had explained it. 'A personal hell that you only go to when someone's going to revive you', he said, echoing that *XD* person who explained it to him. Part of him was relieved, of course, that he'd be revived. Theo fucked up, of course, but he would realize his mistake eventually and use the stolen book to bring him back.

On the other hand, Dream was being tortured. There was no other word for it. He lost track of time completely as his body- his soul?- went through the same experience over and over again. Dream was trapped in a doorless, windowless room as Withering slowly, slowly crawled over his skin, killing his nerves and making him feel every centimeter of his body- soul- dying. Even in death, he wouldn't be free from his fear of dying, and as soon as the last part of him went numb, he would suddenly feel his body again, only for the Withering to start yet again.

Still, he held onto the simple fact that one day, *one day*, he'd be revived. No matter how many times he went through this loop, he'd eventually be free, and then he could get back to guaranteeing he would never have to feel it again. It was inevitable.

Dream is freshly starting a loop, the burning only in the tips of his fingers, when a door opens. There's never been a door before, but there is one now, and despite the intolerable pain, he forces it down, trying to drag himself towards it. Halfway there, a hand comes into view- familiar, pale, with scars he'd placed there himself. He doesn't hesitate to grab it, and it quickly drags him through the doorway-

In a flash, the pain is gone, and Dream gasps for air, air that he hadn't needed in the afterlife but he was so *glad* to have now. The hand releases him, and he drops to an unfamiliar floor. "Wha- what *took* you so long?" he tries to snap, trying to hold his dignity even now, but when he looks up at Theo-

He doesn't recognize him.

No, he does. It's Theo, obviously. His face is the same, if a little more filled out, like he gained a healthy amount of weight. His eyes are the same shade, his hair is still blond, it's still him- but every detail is just *wrong*.

The Theo that stands in front of him is not the child that Dream raised, he thinks almost hysterically. His Theo never had hair long enough to braid. He didn't get to wear *luxuries* like the gold jewelry that the person in front of him is practically dripping in, a crown inlaid with *diamonds* on his head. He-

He didn't have wings. Who is this?

“Theo?” It’s more of a demand than an ask, a demand for this person’s identity.

“It’s Tommy now, actually,” Theo says, smiling down at him. Dream’s already nauseous from being revived, but the feeling is worse when Theo smiles. It’s... unfamiliar. When’s the last time he saw Theo smile in a way that wasn’t forced? That wasn’t shaky and uncertain? It must have been a long time ago-

And he’s never seen Theo smile exactly like this. He doesn’t even recognize it for a moment- is he proud of bringing Dream back? No, it’s not that-

Smug? “Theo,” Dream starts, ignoring the fact that Theo’s picked up some weird nickname. They can discuss *that* later. He begins to get to his feet- it’s almost a struggle, he hasn’t *stood* in so long, the Withering too painful to let him. “You’re-”

Dream hits the ground with a wheeze, and blinks in confusion. It takes embarrassingly long to realize-

Theo just *sweeped his leg*. The disbelief stifles his growing anger for a moment.

“I said it’s *Tommy*, ” Theo repeats, almost whining. Dream winces at the pitch of his voice- it’s so *annoying*. “It’s Tommy Underscore-Beloved-Minecraft-Soot-Salmons-Halo. ... honestly still deciding the best order to that. Tommy’s the only part you need to remember.”

“Halo- *Salmons*? What- what the *fuck* are you talking about?” Dream laughs incredulously. “What, you’re just- taking random people’s last names now? Where will ‘Lore’ go?”

There’s a pause, and then Theo laughs too. It sounds so... light-hearted. Like he’s never had a care in the world. “Oh, shit, I forgot that was Gogy’s last name- kind of stupid, right? George Lore,” he mocks, and Dream’s anger flares back up. “Not that it matters anymore,” Theo goes on, ignoring how Dream starts to stand up again. “He’s been gone for a fucking *while* now, yeah?”

“...what?” Dream asks faintly, frozen mid-motion. Theo must mean something else- George moved, or maybe he quit the hero business. It’s been, what, at least a few months, right? For Theo’s hair to grow that fast- how fast does hair grow again? That makes it seem like it would have been... a while, but not *that* long if Theo is still so baby-faced. And Dream- Dream has *no* idea how long he was in limbo, but it felt like-

He doesn’t want to think about how long it felt like.

“What do you mean George is gone?” Dream asks when Theo doesn’t answer him immediately.

Theo still hasn’t stopped *smiling*, Dream wants to knock it right off his face. “Died, didn’t he?”

The world ends.

But Theo keeps talking anyway. “The Organization didn’t exactly pass on any details to the public, claimed he just *retired*. But Sapnap got all his shit, which was neat. Prime, I

remember when he got back from the funeral, we ended up burning Gogy's stupid hero outfit."

...how long has it been? How long will George have been in limbo? If Theo is staying it like 'he remembers when' - what, a year? How long? *How long?* "How long?" he demands.

"How long what?"

"How long has... has George...?" Dream has to revive him. He'll need to prepare himself for however traumatized George is from it.

...maybe this time George would actually be *grateful*.

"Prime, uh..." Theo thinks it over, taking far too long to consider, how could he not remember it right off the bat? "Fuck if I know. Couple decades now."

...

Couple decades?

He's lying he's lying he's lying he's lying he's lying-

"Only... two years after you died, I think, something like that. No, must've been less than that if the Organization was still fucking around," Theo rambles. "I think it was a little after when Tubs and 'Boo joined us, so like... a year and a half after you, I guess. *Ages ago*."

"What- come *on*, Theo, wh- what are you talking about?" Dream asks uncertainly. Did Theo go *crazy*? He looks a year older at most, still just a *child*, even if he's- even if he's changed so much and he has those *wings*-

Maybe this isn't real. Maybe it's a new, weird level of limbo. Like someone in charge thought Withering was getting boring, time to kick it up a notch with... *this*. Theo, *his* healer, lying about George dying, about, what...

About living forever?

"It's *Tommy*," Theo insists again, finally sounding annoyed instead of just amused. "And I was just answering your *question*, Dream. That's what you always said I was supposed to do, right? Answer when you asked me something? Wil says that's one of the things he *owes* you for-"

"Wil," Dream repeats, the name sour in his mouth. "Wil- *Wilbur Soot*."

He'd almost forgotten, in the years- *years? Decades? Centuries?*- spent in Limbo. Theo ran to the Syndicate. 'New jailers', he called them, but- Dream doesn't understand.

Theo was a hero. Not technically, not on paper, but he was. He was Dream's healer, the strongest support healer the Hero Organization has ever had. The idea of him running off to *villains* was ridiculous at best... but that's what he did. He turned his back to heroism and *gave himself to the Syndicate*.

“...this is what you got in return,” Dream croaks, his anger finally back. “You- you traded yourself for *immortality*?”

The thing Dream had always been desperate for. That Dream did *everything* to get, that he tore apart buildings and people and his own family for. The thing that was supposed to give him peace of mind, comfort that those few attachments he had, the people he cared for that he could count on one finger, would be with him forever.

And yet Theo had gone one step further.

Theo has *finally* lost his smile, but somehow, it doesn't make Dream feel any better. He doesn't think he's ever seen Theo's eyes look so cold. “It's *Tommy*. And I didn't trade myself for shit, Dream. I'm not an *object*. I'm a person.”

“You *know* what I meant-” he snaps.

“Yeah, I do! You meant that I was an object. A *healer*; your healer, right?” Theo snorts, still glaring down at him. “It took me so long to get past that, you know? And do you *know* how hard it is to find a good therapist when you're a villain? I had to read fucking self-help books and shit. Those are so boring!”

Dream starts to get up again, his anger flaring up further. Theo calling himself a *villain*, so naturally, as if it's just what he is- what he is is a *healer*. He's *meant* to protect people, to care for others, so how did he get so fucking twisted? How did he-?

There's a glint of silver, and then of *gold* as a small throwing knife imbeds itself in his knee. Dream's leg immediately buckles under his weight and he falls again. The pain is sudden, sharp-

Grounding. It makes this feel less... dream-like. Less like some new stage of Limbo, more like this is *real* and Theo is a *villain* and- and he just threw a knife at him. At *Dream*.

“Using your power to make me avoid nerves is just cheating,” Theo grumbles, as if they're just playing *Monopoly*. Dream just gapes at him. “Next time I'm borrowing power suppressors, that's just *bullshit*. ”

Dream's off-kilter. Theo shouldn't hurt people. That's literally the opposite of what he's meant to do. And for him to hurt Dream- Dream, who took him from that farm, who gave him a purpose, who tried to keep him from *monsters*-

“I shouldn't even be surprised,” Dream hisses. “You've always been so *ungrateful*. ” Theo's scowl falls, turning to confusion, and he presses forward. “I gave you safety, a *home*, a *brother*, and you threw it-”

Theo's wings spread out, catching Dream's eye and distracting him for just a *moment*- just long enough for Theo to shoot his arm forward and grab Dream by the hair, holding his head still and smashing a fist into the side of his face.

It's almost familiar, in a few ways. Dream is used to being on this side of it against villains. He's used to being on the other side when it comes to Theo.

"Never say that again," Theo says, his voice strained almost inhumanly. His nails dig into the top of Dream's skull. "You weren't my brother. You were a monster. A violent piece of *shit* who treated me like a toy. Who tried to *break* me." Theo's nails dig in harder, enough to draw blood. "I have brothers now. I know the fucking difference. And I know if you ever call yourself my brother again, I'll rip your fucking *tongue* out."

Dream just stares up at him. He can't... he can't even process this. His Theo-

No.

Theo. Just Theo.

Tommy?

This person in front of him is not the child he raised. This is a monster, just like the Syndicate. An immortal, inhuman beast, who can laugh about George's death, who can talk about decades passing like it was days.

Dream can't understand it. Where did he go wrong?

The monster rolls its eyes at his lack of reaction and lets go of Dream's hair, letting him fall into a heap on the ground. He just stares after it as it turns around, not even trying to get up with his injured leg.

"I'm not ungrateful," the monster mutters. "I know *exactly* what I owe you, Clay. And so does my family. There's a whole tally, you know? Blade says he owes you at least four, from hurting Wil, and me, and this whole 'disrespect for healers' you've got in general. Wil keeps adding to his, I think he's at a dozen. They're *all* about me, though, he doesn't even care about the time you Withered him. Fundy wants one, Sapnap wants a few hits in but he said he isn't sure if-"

"Sapnap?" Dream whispers, confused. Fundy- Fundy isn't too surprising. He always suspected he was more involved in his family than he would admit, considering how firm he was about not bringing them up. But Sapnap- if George is dead, then Sapnap would be by now too, right? There's no way this monster would let him live.

The monster snorts, still facing away. Its wings block whatever it's doing from view. "I kept him," it says, as if that isn't even more confusing. Alarming, even. "We made up when you weren't around to fuck us both up. Plus, him and his husbands are my *flock*. I wasn't going to lose them if I didn't have to. It wasn't too hard to get my family to offer them eternity- Blade's friends with Ace, and Angel and Wil get how important flock is, so."

That... explains nothing to him. He doesn't understand anything.

"*Anyway*, what I'm saying is- I know what I owe you." The monster turns back to face him.

The monster is holding a flower crown.

“These aren’t the same ones I grew back then, obviously,” the monster says, cradling the flowers almost lovingly. “But I studied the revival book. I wanted to make sure I knew *everything* you could do before we even thought about bringing you back. I mean- I wasn’t going to let you hurt my brother again, yeah? Not in a way I couldn’t fix, anyway. So I tested everything in there to make sure I could heal it.” He holds the crown up a little higher. “And I thought this’d be a good start.”

Dream can’t look away from the flowers. He recognizes Wither Roses, of course, and the fear washes away his anger completely. “Th- *Tommy*,” he forces out. “You can’t-”

“I mean, I’m gonna,” it says, far too easily. “And it’s going to kill you. And then, when my family feels like it, we’ll bring you back to get in what *they* owe you.”

Dream rips the knife out of his knee, even as it brings new pain and even more blood flowing out unhindered. He has to get *out* of here, he can’t let the monster-

Its foot slams down onto his bad knee, and it’s only the dregs of his self control that stop him from screaming. “You’re not going *anywhere*. Except Limbo, I guess.” Dream desperately tries to pull on his powers, tries to get *anything* to happen that would destabilize the monster, give him a chance of escape, but-

He’s pinned. No amount of luck is enough to get him free.

“You know, this is the right time for me to pull out all the same fucked up *shit* you said to me the night you died.” The way the monster’s eyes glow makes it look all the more unhinged as it grins and lowers the crown, despite how he tries to pull away.

“Thing is,” it whispers. “I don’t even remember what you said. Because you don’t have a *hold* on me anymore. This? This is just for *fun*. ”

The burn of Withering rips into his skull, and-

And-

Dream only has an eternity of *this* to look forward to.

“I’m a healer,” the monster tells him, unaffected as it watches his flesh burn and flake off. “But I’m *myself* first.”

Chapter End Notes

first of all:

[winged family fanart](#)

[fanart of the epilogue](#)

second of all, this is the official end of I'm a Healer But. honestly, i did not expect this to get as big as it did- either in length or in how many people noticed it. this was a fucking RIDE.

now, while this is technically the end, it might not be ENTIRELY. there are a lot of little pieces i want to write about- things that happen between the ending and the epilogue, maybe some backstory of when tommy was in las nevadas, kristin becoming death, etc- so i may write a bunch of oneshots in this universe. if i do, i would add a temporary chapter to IAHB to let people know it's become a series.

alternately, you could subscribe to my writing, because holy shit do i have a lot of other works in story. right now i'm working on tommy being the golden goose, a vampire au based around dadnoblade, and a bunnyblade oneshot. if you're interested, please keep an eye out!

thank you for reading I'm a Healer But. I hope you enjoyed.

End Notes

got this idea (and my partner encouraged me far too well) so now i'm writing this and alien boy simultaneously... rip. hopefully i can update both in a timely manner. wish me luck

edit: you can find me on tumblr or twitter @ dioslab!

Works inspired by this one

[I'm a Healer, But... \[PODFIC\]](#) by [Heo_heno](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!